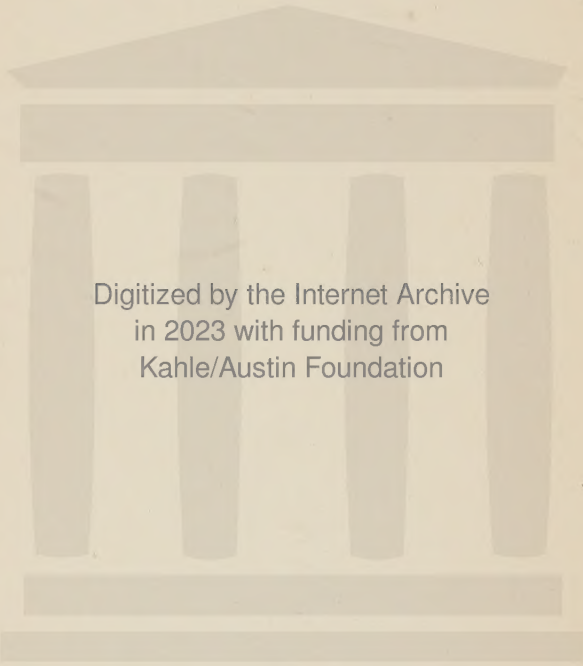


CAMP-FIRE GIRLS

RURAL RETREAT





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Campfire Girls in the Country

Campfire Girls' Rural Retreat

.. OR ..

The Quest of a Secret

By

IRENE ELLIOTT BENSON



M. A. DONOHUE & COMPANY

Chicago

New York

Campfire Girls' Series

**Campfire Girls in the Alleghany
Mountains;**

Or, A Christmas Success Against Odds

Campfire Girls in the Country;

Or, The Secret Aunt Hannah Forgot

Campfire Girls' Trip Up the River;

Or, Ethel Hollister's First Lesson

Campfire Girls' Outing;

Or, Ethel Hollister's Second Summer in Camp

Campfire Girls on a Hike;

Or, Lost in the Great North Woods

Campfire Girls at Twin Lakes;

Or, The Quest of a Summer Vacation

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INDEX

CHAPTER

I	A Country Town Fourth of July.....	9
II	Aunt Hannah's Indignation.....	15
III	Aunt Hannah's Loss.....	21
IV	A Startling Discovery.....	27
V	Locked Out	35
VI	Braving the Spooks.....	40
VII	Letting Hazel Explain.....	46
VIII	Back to Camp.....	51
IX	Dissect and Analyze Gossip.....	58
X	An Unwelcome Caller.....	68
XI	A Storm and a Story.....	73
XII	A Sequel to the Secret.....	80
XIII	Hazel Asks a Question.....	85
XIV	A Story Cut Short.....	90
XV	Hazel Figures It Out.....	95
XVI	Three Messengers.....	99
XVII	Calling Help.....	103
XVIII	Camp Fire Girl Scouts.....	108
XIX	The Rescue.....	113
XX	Sleeping Too Late.....	122
XXI	The Midnight Council Fire.....	127
XXII	Aunt Hannah Wakes Up.....	133
XXIII	Aunt Hannah Remembers.....	138
XXIV	Aunt Hannah Shoots.....	143
XXV	She Hit the Mark.....	149

CAMPFIRE GIRLS SERIES

**HOW ETHEL HOLLISTER BECAME A
CAMPFIRE GIRL**

**ETHEL HOLLISTER'S SECOND SUMMER
AS A CAMPFIRE GIRL**

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"Camp Fire Girls in the Country"

OR

"The Secret Aunt Hannah Forgot"

BY STELLA M. FRANCIS,

Author of

"CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN THE ALLEGHENY MOUNTAINS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A COUNTRY-TOWN FOURTH OF JULY.

It was the Fourth of July throughout the western hemisphere and in all other portions of the earth where the midnight second of the Third had "ticked" and passed. It was emphatically the Fourth in the United States, including the eastern town of Fairberry, a municipality of some 3,500 inhabitants. On this day there were considerably more than 3,500 men, women, and children in the place, and a cosmopolitan gathering of country and town folk it was, artisans, merchants, professional men, farmers, laborers, and their wives and children or sweethearts. It was a gala day for dress, millinery, chatter, peanuts, popcorn, lemonade, ice cream soda, toy balloons, bazoos, and squawkers—everything but fire-crackers, which had recently been legislated a national nuisance.

The gathering place for this great concourse of every kind and description of humanity inhabiting the town and the country round about was the public square. And a typical public square it was. In the first place it was truly square, for it had been thus sighted and staked by the original surveyor. And along the lines thus staked representative business men and capitalists had constructed some two thousand feet front of store buildings, which were occupied by the most cheerful aggregation of citizens in the town. In explanation of this characterization of these citizens we must cynically observe that all of them had something to sell.

This square boasted of one "skyscraper"—three stories high. Most of the other mercantile buildings were two stories high. This "skyscraper" was the pride of the town—a really well planned and well constructed building with pressed brick south front and east side, located on the north-east corner of the square. The First National bank occupied the first floor of this building.

In the center of the square was the county courthouse, sections of which were occupied by officials of the municipality in lieu of a city hall. This building, a massive turreted, pressed-brick and stone structure in the center of a neatly terraced lawn inclosed by a chain fence, had the distinction of possessing a town-clock tower that arose to a loftier height than the "skyscraper" and rivaled the Methodist

church steeple three blocks away as to "loftiness above the sea level." The church, by the way, stood on a considerably lower site, or this rivalry would not have been possible.

Well, the patriotic crowd moved here and there, around the "periphery" of the square and back again, or around and around and around, while the peanut and lemonade vendors called out their wares and a phonograph over the entrance of a motion picture theater sung rag-time music to attract the attention of the amusement seekers.

The more quietly disposed of the congregated populace, however, sought the restful convenience of the courthouse lawn or the refreshing protection of a dozen shade trees standing along the line of the chain fence. Others, especially the younger element, not quite so staid of demeanor, moved hither and thither, sometimes with the stream of gay-spirited and gaily attired humanity around the square, sometimes upon the lawn, where they would gather in social groups around the band stand, and sometimes upon the battlement-like balustrades and porticos of the elaborate exterior of the courthouse.

Among this younger element were thirteen girls in khaki middy suits and light-brown sailor straw hats, whom the whole town knew by this time as the full membership of Flamingo Camp Fire. These girls for more than a week had been visiting at the home of Mrs. Hannah Hutchins, an odd character past

the prime of life, but withal a kindly disposed and interesting widow, who owned a considerable estate a quarter of a mile east of the city limits.

To readers of this Camp Fire series, the faces of these girls are at once familiar. They are the Wood Gatherers, Fire Makers, and Torch Bearers whose experiences during the last preceding Christmas holidays constituted the motive of interest in another volume, entitled "Camp Fire Girls in the Allegheny Mountains; or, A Christmas Success Against Odds."

Those experiences were of a character so remarkable, so thrilling, as to render this Camp Fire an organization of no slight distinction, not only among wearers of the emblems and badges of the craft and chanters of Wohelo Cheer, but even with the public at large; for nation-wide publicity had been given to their adventures in a coal mining district where their mission of charity had met with extreme opposition from certain unprincipled men. Indeed, it is not too much to say that these adventures had been the chief subject of discussion among the members of the Fire, except, perhaps the immediate affairs of their daily life, during the entire second semester of the school year.

Then came another and longer vacation—ten weeks in the summer. What should they do during this period? was the question that held their attention more and more as the

year's school work at Hiawatha Institute drew nearer and nearer to a close. For two weeks after it was first broached, the problem remained unsolved; then Hazel Edwards created a buzz of interest by laying before her associate Flamingoites a proposition just received by her from a relative living alone with three or four servants and farming assistants on the wide and picturesque country seat she had inherited from her late husband. This relative was her Aunt Hannah Hutchins, who had taken a fancy to Hazel when the latter was a little tot in rompers, and her interest in her niece had not lessened with fourteen or fifteen years of age.

"She wants us all to come and stay as long as we care to," Hazel announced. "Aunt Hannah has been kind o' lonesome, you see, since her husband died and she's always begging her favorite relatives and friends to come and visit her. She likes young folks especially. We'd have dandy places to camp, and I bet Aunt Hannah would be just tickled to death to come out and camp with us. She's just that kind—a little odd at her age, but you wouldn't notice that after you got acquainted."

The proposition was taken up seriously. Then followed a period of correspondence between the girls and their parents. The latter were more cautious than usual in their inquiry into the vacation plans of their daughters, and well they might be, for had not these thirteen girls in their last mid-winter holidays excur-

sion been snatched at the eleventh hour right out of the jaws of tragedy by a band of hurriedly organized rescuers?

But at last the consent of the fathers and mothers of Flamingo Fire was obtained, after it had been shown that Fairberry was a quiet little city, populated chiefly by retired country folk, and that Aunt Hannah's farm contained no such menaces to human life and comfort as precipices, open mine shafts, poison ivy, savage dogs, kicking horses, and distempered cattle. After a week at their several homes following the closing of school, these thirteen Camp Fire girls reconvened by invitation of Hazel Edwards on an agreed date at the semi-wilderness country seat of odd and interesting Aunt Hannah.

And so we find them all on this Fourth of July afternoon in two or three groups on the lawn and on the massive stone portico of the west entrance of the courthouse, chatting among themselves or with other girl acquaintances they had met since their arrival, while the kinetic picture of human life moved round and round and across and betwixt and between, and the venders called their wares, and the band played, and the Japanese tumblers tumbled, and the "skyscraper" scraped with staid dignity, undisturbed by the inharmonious mixture of soulful music, reckless gayeties, spendthrift patriotism, a wealth of national colors and a general confusion of nondescript noises.

CHAPTER II.

AUNT HANNAH'S INDIGNATION.

Aunt Hannah was present on this occasion, but she did not attempt to be a girl with the girls. One thing Aunt Hannah knew, if she didn't know anything else, so she said, and that was how to keep where she belonged. Middle-aged women, she declared, should not seek the company of younger folk, although they could with good grace accept the society of girls of all ages if it came to them gracefully and with juvenile interest.

"In other words," she said, "an adult should be unto children like a magnet. If I can't draw the young folks to me as an object of interest to them, I'd better seek the company of dried-up grown-ups or live the life of a hermit."

Now, the members of Flamingo Camp Fire did like Aunt Hannah from the first day they met her. They liked her especially because she invited them to come to her home for a vacation period, and then didn't try to force her adult notions and habits upon them. She gave them the freedom of her place, told them to live in the house or pitch their tents wherever they chose and then permitted them to go their way as it might please them. The result was they never forgot Aunt Hannah's

comfort and ease and interest whatever they might have in mind to do.

So Aunt Hannah was with the girls on this Fourth of July. As this narrative opens we find her seated on the lawn in company with Miss Harriet Ladd, Guardian of the Fire; Ruth Hazelton, Ethel Zimmerman, Ernestine Johanson, Helen Nash, Azalia Atwood, and Marion Stanlock, about 100 feet from the performing platform of the Japanese tumblers. Hazel Edwards, Harriet Newcomb, Estelle Adler, Julietta Hyde, Marie Crismore, Katherine Crane, and Violet Munday, the other members of the Fire, were grouped with several local school girls on the large and massively balustraded portico of the west entrance of the courthouse.

Suddenly the attention of everybody within view was directed to a disturbance and a congestion of the crowd toward the south-west corner of the square. "A fight," was the word passed along, and those of sporting proclivity rushed toward the center of interest. The chief of police, a man of official lonesomeness under ordinary circumstances, and his half-a-dozen specially sworn-in deputies all hastened toward the scene of trouble.

Those on the courthouse lawn and on the portico and table-like balustrade, from their more elevated positions, could see more distinctly than the rest of the crowd of patriotic celebrators what was going on. Two men were evidently engaged in a physical combat

of no little violence, and the policemen were having their troubles in attempting to get room enough to make their official efforts effective. If the battle had been between the Monitor and the Merrimac, the crowd could hardly have pressed forward more eagerly.

"Did you ever see anything like it," Aunt Hannah commented for the edification of those near her; "the way the people will run to see a fight! I don't know of anything that will prove Darwin's theory any better than that. There is no doubt in my mind that our way-back ancestors lived in a jungle; and who'd deny, after seeing that sight, that a lot of us ought to be there now?"

"Good for you, Mrs. Hutchins!" exclaimed Adolph Helfinger, a farming character well known in the community, who was one of the score or more of persons that heard the woman's biological criticism of fight-loving humanity. "It does beat all how things do get impressed on people's minds. I never had any use for that there monkey theory, but I'll be switched if I don't believe there's sompin' to it now. It's just as plain as daylight: if people wasn't sprung from monkeys, they wouldn't always be makin' monkeys o' themselves."

Everybody in hearing distance of these two speeches laughed heartily. The Camp Fire Girls on the courthouse portico, observing that the group on the lawn had become a center of interest that counteracted the de-

pressing and unsavory effect of the fight, left their position and joined Aunt Hannah's group.

"What's the joke?" inquired Harriet Newcomb, as she and the other girls with her distributed themselves here and there on unoccupied portions of the seating capacity of the lawn.

"That is an impertinent question," replied Aunt Hannah with mock severity. "If some of you exclusive people would drop your exclusiveness and seek the company of bright folks, you'd be more likely to be on hand when something interesting turns up."

"Very well," Harriet acquiesced gravely. "We'll sit right down with you-uneses and wait for something more that is brilliant to happen. I do really hope it will come pretty soon, for that big crowd of fight fans over there gets my goat."

"Why, Miss Newcomb!" Aunt Hannah exclaimed as if deeply shocked. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself to use such slang in my presence before you know whether I approve of it?"

"Don't you approve of slang, Mrs. Hutchins?" asked Katherine Crane.

"Now don't you try to put me to any such test as that, 'cause I won't fall for it," the demure madam answered. "That is getting away from the issue. This is not a question of slang, but of diplomacy. I am very fond of diplomats, Miss Newcomb."

"Oh, I knew you weren't very unfriendly toward slang," Harriet replied positively. "I don't believe in diplomacy when I am sure of my ground."

"You talk like an old head," Aunt Hannah commented admiringly.

"I am only seventeen," Harriet flashed back with the dignity of youth consciousness; "but I'm old enough to understand that diplomacy is made up chiefly of camouflage fibs."

"What are camouflage fibs?" inquired Azalia Atwood. "You are forever springing big words on us, Harriet. Now make good and explain this one."

"Camouflage," the challenged girl began, having in view a scholarly discourse on the French origin of the idea in European warfare. Then she stopped suddenly and fixed her attention on something that was taking place a few feet from the temporarily unoccupied Japanese tumblers' stand. Every other person in the group dominated by Aunt Hannah and the Camp Fire girls followed with their eyes the direction of her gaze.

"There's another fight, Mrs. Hutchins," Harriet continued, changing her subject to fit the occasion. "I'm going to keep still and give some of the bright folks a chance to produce something interesting."

Yes, two men were engaged in a pugilistic demonstration that looked like the beginning of another unsavory sensation. The cause of their hostility toward each other was not

apparent, but at the start, had the appearance of being about as ridiculously unequal as it well could be. One of the men was not more than five feet-six inches tall and slight of stature; the other was over six feet and built like an athlete. A cry of indignation went up from hundreds of throats as the large man was seen to reach forward suddenly and give the smaller fellow a slap on the face that could be heard two hundred feet away.

"Villain!" exclaimed Mrs. Hutchins, with high indignation, and the sentiment was echoed in like manner from many other quarters.

CHAPTER III.

AUNT HANNAH'S LOSS.

But "the villain" did not have everything his own way. After the resounding slap administered on the face of the smaller man, there followed a sparring match that proved to be the biggest thriller of the day's celebrations. It all happened so quickly that before a crowd could gather closely enough to hamper their movements, the two men were staging a mill the like of which, for speed, had probably never been witnessed in that town before.

The little fellow made one savage leap at his antagonist, in return for the latter's resounding salute on the face, and from that moment until the fight was finished his feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground. He appeared to be able to hit his opponent wherever and whenever he pleased. He was plainly a master of the art of springing, ducking, sidestepping, lunging. The crowd, observing that here was a rare exhibition of great skill opposed to vast superiority of weight and strength, kept back at a respectful distance in order that the smaller man might have free play. But thousands of men, women and children on the square, however, pressed forward to witness so unusual a scene, forming a dense circular wall of sight-seers. On the inner rim of this circle stood Aunt Hannah, Miss Ladd

and the thirteen members of Flamingo Camp Fire.

For fifteen minutes the pugilistic performance continued, the larger man being the aggressor most of the time, but receiving all of the punishment. If any of the policemen who had stopped the first fight, returned to the scene of this engagement, no attempt was made to interfere. The skill and speed of the little fellow seemed to create a popular demand that so novel a contest be permitted to go to a finish. Possibly the guardians of the peace realized the overwhelming sentiment in favor of a "sportsman's fair play" and discreetly kept the strong hand of the law in their pocket.

The big fighter swung viciously, desperately, again and again at his clever little foe, but in vain. The latter brought cheer upon cheer from the throng by cleverly dodging all these attacks and answering them with such agility of foot, body, and hand work that a skilled referee would have had difficulty in estimating the number of successful blows he succeeded in landing. Once the bantam fighter dodged right between the legs of his enraged antagonist and upset him, to the almost insane delight of the crowd.

This seemed to be the turning point of the mill. The thoroughly whipped bully evidently had had all he wanted, and was looking for some means of getting away from his physical and moral embarrassment. While he was thus

casting about for an avenue of escape, the spry little scrapper was dancing all around him and raining blows almost wherever he pleased, while the big victim shielded his head with his arms and the crowd fairly howled with delight.

Suddenly the defeated fighter broke away and ran, his punisher pursuing close at his heels. As a sprinter, the winner of the bout proved also to be the superior of his late antagonist. The latter lumbered away like a groggy 'longshoreman. Suddenly the vanquisher of superior weight and muscle made a spring like that of a wild beast and landed on the back of the fugitive. The latter staggered, stumbled, almost fell, then began running around in a wabby circle, while the onlookers pressed back, eager to give way for a continuation of the exhibition as long as possible. Finally the affair reached a climax when the "jockey-scrapper" "shinned" up the back of his victim and stood erect for perhaps a minute, while the human horse, struggled, staggered and actually groaned in distress and the crowd "screamed itself hoarse."

The scene was closed when the "hero-victor" leaped lightly from the shoulders of the exhausted bully and refrained from making further attack. The defeated man slunk away in the crowd while his conquerer, with an affectation of modesty, also managed to slip away and was seen no more by the hundreds of curious citizens and hero worshipers, who

longed for just one glimpse of this human wildcat when not in action.

The members of Flamingo Fire fairly held their breath during much of the performance. So tense was their excitement, as quite naturally it should be, that each of them was scarcely conscious of anything else, in action or being, other than this sensational affair. They were all "waked up" finally by this exclamatory remark from Mrs. Hutchins:

"Well!"—followed by a pause for the exhaling of a long pent-up breath—"That's the nearest I ever came to seeing a prize fight, and I hope I never come any nearer."

"I bet that was a part of the day's entertainment," declared one of the wise wights of the town, who was standing near. "Nobody can tell me such a thing as that could take place without being staged ahead."

"They wouldn't dare," Aunt Hannah returned positively. "The town wouldn't stand for such a disgraceful put-over as that was."

"You can't tell what the town will stand for until it's put to the test," retorted the keen-headed individual. "It seems to me that everybody was pretty much delighted over the affair, judging from the enthusiastic noise they made."

"Aunt Hannah, where's your handbag?" Hazel asked suddenly.

Mrs. Hutchins looked down at her hands and then up again in astonishment at her niece.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "Where is it? I had it in my hand." Then she began an examination of the lawn near where she stood.

"And my pocketbook's gone!" exclaimed Ernestine Johanson, after a search in the pocket of her middy blouse.

"Mine's gone, too," was the startling announcement of Violet Munday. Then Ethel Zimmerman capped the climax of sensations by declaring:

"Somebody has taken my diamond lavalier!"

"There are pickpockets in the crowd!" screamed a woman a short distance away, who had discovered her hand bag wide open and the money section emptied of its contents.

Presently another woman picked up Mrs. Hutchins' handbag and identified it by a name-card inside. She turned it over to its owner, who announced after examining it:

"There was fifteen dollars in it, and it's gone."

Then suddenly she began a nervous, hurried search in the handbag, as if moved by the recollection of something vastly more important than the missing fifteen dollars. The look of despair that came over her face as she took out the last remaining article was sufficient evidence that her search was unsuc-

cessful. With a gasp, she seized her niece's arm for support, exclaiming:

"O Hazel, it's gone, it's gone! What will I ever do? Oh, I must find it, I must find it, I must find it!"

CHAPTER IV.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"What's the matter, Aunt Hannah? What have you lost?" Hazel inquired with deep concern, moved by her relative's agitation.

But Mrs. Hutchins' distress was even greater than at first it appeared. Fearing that she was about to faint, two of the girls took hold of her arms to support her. Evidently she was in need of this assistance, for her weight rested heavily on them.

"Somebody call a taxi and we'll take her home," Hazel requested.

No further effort was made at this time to learn what was the article whose loss had so unnerved the now unhappy woman. It was not necessary to call a taxicab, for Mrs. Hutchins' friends were numbered almost by the population of the town, and a machine belonging to one of the leading citizens was offered for service. Hazel, Marion Stanlock and Helen Nash accompanied her in the automobile to her home.

Mrs. Hutchins rallied considerably soon after the machine left the crowded square and began a nervous half-hysterical discussion of the developments of the day.

"I bet there was a regular army of pick-pockets in that crowd," she said. "I bet, too, that you'll find they were scattered all over the

square and worked like beavers during the excitement. You just see if a very large number of people weren't robbed."

"And the very thing happened that they needed to make their work easy," Marion suggested.

"I wonder if it really 'just happened,'" said Hazel dubiously. "I can't help feeling that there was something mighty funny in that fight. We girls have had a good deal of athletic training at school, and while they don't exactly make acrobats out of us, we know something about balancing ourselves under difficulties. Now, I don't believe that little fellow could have remained balanced on the shoulders of the larger man unless—"

Hazel hesitated. The other passengers of the automobile gazed at her expectantly.

"Unless what?" Helen asked. "Unless there was collusion?"

"Exactly," Hazel replied, just a little relieved at the removal from her of the responsibility for the audacious idea that really was in her mind and seeking expression.

"But you know cowboys can hang onto a bucking broncho until it is tired out," reasoned Marion, who was less inclined to suspicion.

"Yes, and they can do that only after long practice," Hazel answered quickly. "And what man, I don't care how athletic he may be, can balance himself standing on the shoulders of another man who is trying to throw

him off? I don't believe even a circus rider could do it."

"You mean that the whole performance was a fake?" Aunt Hannah inquired.

"Yes, or a part of the day's program."

"No, that wouldn't be allowed any more than a genuine prize fight," Marion objected.

"I think you're right," Hazel assented.

"But what was the reason for putting over such a gigantic fake?" Marion asked.

"It might have been to give the pickpockets an opportunity to get their work in," was Hazel's keen suggestion.

"My, I can hardly believe it!" Marion exclaimed.

"I'm not saying positively that any such audacious trick as that was planned, but I won't dismiss the idea until the thing is fully explained!" Aunt Hannah declared.

All of the girls returned to Mrs. Hutchins' home for supper, for although they had a camp with tents pitched and everything in complete outing order, arrangements had been made for feeding and housing them indoors that night, so as to obviate laborious details that might hinder them from getting the most possible from the day's celebrations. Moreover, there was to be a grand display of fireworks at the lake in the evening, and everybody had planned to be on the scene as early as possible.

Aunt Hannah recovered rapidly from the nervous shock she had received, following her

return home in company with three of the girls. But still she was evidently depressed by the loss she had suffered and announced that she would not go to the lake to see the fireworks.

"I think I'll stay here with you, auntie," Hazel announced at the dinner table.

"No, you won't," Mrs. Hutchins returned quickly. "You'll go out with the other girls and have a good time. I'll be all right—nothing the matter with me—only a little upset. I've got a good appetite and my digestion's fine."

"But I don't like to leave you here alone," Hazel insisted.

"What do you think I'd do if you girls weren't here?" inquired the rebellious patient. Haven't I got Minerva, the best housekeeper on earth, here with me, and couldn't she shoo away anything from a ghost to a nightmare? You Camp Fire girls have got the notion that nobody can do anything quite right except yourselves. But I want to inform you that there are others in this world, especially when it's your duty to unload some of the world's burden from your shoulders and enjoy yourselves. Ain't it so, Minerva?"

The latter, a sleek, jolly-faced colored woman, who was engaged in serving peaches and devil's food cake for dessert, showed her appreciation of the honor of reference to her as an authority by replying heartily:

"'Deed it is, Missus Hutchins. They sure

ought to go an' see them there fireworks 'thout pera-venture of any doubt. I jus' natcherly want to stay with you here alone, Missus, an' don't want no one hanging aroun' what ought to be enjoyin' umselves."

"How about you, Minerva—wouldn't you like to go an' see the fireworks yourself?" Hazel asked.

"Now, bless your heart, chile, you do make some funny propysishuns. The very idea! Me see fireworks. Ha! ha! ha!"

And as she laughed, her loosely knit avoirdupois shook comically.

This merry discussion relieved considerably the strain of the day's doings, so that the misgivings of the girls at the prospect of leaving their hostess alone with the faithful colored housekeeper were considerably allayed. Mrs. Hutchins kept up a general appearance and manner of cheerfulness, although several times Hazel wondered if this appearance were not produced with great effort, as she observed her aunt apparently lapse into momentary despondency. But if the girl was not mistaken as to appearances, Aunt Hannah successfully disarmed suspicion each time by some light remark or gayety of manner difficult to associate with depression of spirits.

So the girls all went to Lake Elyn, a pretty sheet of water half a mile long and a furlong wide, resting comfortably in a platter-like depression between the south-eastern edge of the

town and a succession of wooded hills. In the course of the events of the evening they heard many references to the sensational affair of the afternoon and learned that the number of persons known to have been robbed had been growing hourly until the stories that were being circulated had become almost unbelievable. Many watches had been taken, valuable necklaces worn by women had disappeared, and scores of pocketbooks containing amounts from a few cents up to \$200 had been taken from the pockets and handbags of men and women. The members of Flamingo Camp Fire returned to Mrs. Hutchins' home about eleven o'clock that night filled with awe at the grand scale on which the operations of the pick-pockets had been conducted.

Aunt Hannah had prepared sleeping quarters for the girls before they arrived at her home and directed them to make use of these accommodations whenever, for any reason, they desired a change from camp life. So on this occasion they all knew their places and reached their several bedrooms without delay or confusion and without disturbing the other occupants of the house.

Hazel and Harriet Newcomb together occupied an upstairs room at the east end of the long Dixie-like frame house. Fifteen minutes after their return from the evening's celebration they were in bed, and the general quiet throughout the place indicated that the other girls also had retired.

They fell asleep almost immediately, but did not slumber undisturbed until break of day. Hazel was the first to open her eyes. Her first conscious sense was one of alarm. Then she found herself wondering if she had had an unpleasant dream. She recalled the principal events of the Fourth of July celebration and attempted to convince herself that the repulsive fight she had witnessed was only a nightmare, but the delusion did not remain with her long.

She looked toward the east window and observed the yellow moonlight streaming in like atmospheric gold. As the reality of things dawned upon her, she recalled the fact that some very distinct creaking noise, as of the swinging of a door, had awakened her. Almost at the same instant the sound was repeated, and with a thrill of apprehension she almost sprang out of bed and hastened to the window and looked out.

The first glance over the moonlit yard brought nothing remarkable to her view except the beauty of the mellow scene, which, however, she was in no frame of mind to recognize. The kitchen was around on the north side of the house, but a curved walk leading from this entrance wound around a flower bed to the east and off toward a gate near the automobile drive. Keeping her eyes on this view, Hazel listened intently for further noises down stairs.

Suddenly from the shadow of the house to

the north appeared the form of a woman clad in a loose robe and with nothing on her head. Hazel was so startled for the moment that she retained only slight control of her senses, and it is small wonder that she gave a sharp gasp of astonishment.

The woman was Aunt Hannah!

CHAPTER V.

LOCKED OUT.

"Hazel, what is the matter? What in the world are you doing?"

This inquiry, coming from Harriet, who had been awakened by Hazel's awed exclamation, caused the latter to turn half around, although she retained her position at the window. Her friend was sitting up in bed.

"Come here quick," Hazel urged in a strange, almost hollow voice.

Harriet was soon at her side and following with her eyes the direction indicated by her companion's finger. She saw the form of a woman, scarcely clothed for an out-of-doors excursion even in the middle of the night, and with her uncovered hair hanging loosely over her shoulders.

"Why, it's your aunt," Harriet exclaimed. "What is she doing? Where is she going?"

"I don't know," Hazel replied. "I must go out and see."

"I'll go with you," the other girl volunteered.

"We'll put on our tennis shoes and kimonos and slip on our cravenetted rain coats—that'll be enough—and try to catch her before she gets away from us," Hazel said. "Come on quick."

In a second both girls were executing this dressing program with greater rapidity than

they ever before had engaged in any proceeding of like character. After it was completed they hastened down stairs and out the back way.

The night wanderer was no longer in sight, but while dressing Hazel had kept watch through the east window and observed the direction her aunt was taking. She saw her pass through a gate leading into the orchard and then lost her as the shadow of a large apple tree obscured her from view.

Hazel led the way from the rear entrance to the orchard gate. As they passed through, Harriet inquired:

"What do you suppose she is doing? What could have caused her to come out here at this time of night?"

"It's a hard thing for me to figure out," Hazel replied with as much deliberation as was consistent with her rapid movements. "But one possible explanation has occurred to me."

"What's that?"

"I'm afraid yesterday's experience and the loss she says she suffered have affected her mind."

"Oh, I hope not," Harriet deplored sympathetically.

"So do I, but I'm afraid it's something of that kind."

They were now running along a path that led them through the midst of the orchard toward a timber of twenty or thirty acres in

extent directly to the east. Near the far edge of this timber the girls' camp was located, and the pursuit was leading them directly toward it. The orchard covered about three acres, consisting principally of large apple, peach, cherry and pear trees, most of them many years old. As the two girls were running through this place, Harriet inquired of Hazel:

"Have you any idea what time it is?"

"Yes," was the reply. "It's twenty minutes after two. I slipped on my wrist watch as we were dressing and looked at it when we got out in the moonlight."

"Where do you think your aunt has gone?" Harriet continued.

"That's pretty hard to say. About the best we can do is to follow this path. That's what she was doing when she disappeared from my view."

At the east edge of the orchard the girls found another gate which opened into the timber land. They passed through and continued their way along the path that wound among the trees in a general easterly direction.

The timber was fairly clear of deadwood and underbrush, so that there was little obstruction to their progress. Finally the followers of Aunt Hannah came to the edge of a small clearing, which was crossed by the path, and were about to slip into the open when Hazel stopped suddenly and seized her companion by the arm.

"There she is," she said in a warning whisper.

But Harriet saw the object of the attention of her friend almost as soon as did the latter, and it was unnecessary to stop her. She stood still and awaited instruction what next to do. It was not long coming.

"Let's hide behind these bushes and watch her," Hazel proposed.

She led the way and Harriet followed. The bushes were only a few feet from the path, and in a few seconds the girls were concealed behind them and peering cautiously out at the advancing woman.

Mrs. Hutchins passed so close to the watchers that they could see the features of her face distinctly in spite of the shadows of the trees. The look in her eyes was not wild or insane, as both girls feared it would prove to be. It was calm, somewhat troubled, and meditative. But there was something more in the expression of her face that thrilled Hazel and Harriet with a good deal of awe. Apparently she was unconscious of her surroundings, although she seemed to have sufficient command of her senses to pick her way in a kind of subconscious manner.

"She's asleep," Hazel whispered. "Be careful, don't wake her, as it might scare her nearly to death. She's probably going back to the house. Come on, we'll follow her."

The two girls returned to the path and followed Mrs. Hutchins at a distance of

twenty-five or thirty feet back to the orchard gate, through the orchard, still along the path over which they had made their way to the timber, and into the east yard of the home of their strange hostess. The circular, dome-roofed garage was near the path a short distance from the orchard gate, and in the shadow of this they waited, at Hazel's suggestion, until Aunt Hannah got into the house. They feared to advance in the open through the yard while the somnambulist was opening the door, lest she turn and see them and perhaps awake.

After the sleep-walker was inside and had closed the door, the girls waited five minutes or more to give her time to get back into bed before they ventured to advance to the kitchen entrance. Meanwhile they watched the east window of Aunt Hannah's bedroom to see if she would turn on the light, but there was no illumination through the shade, and they assumed that she had returned to bed in the dark.

As soon as they deemed it safe to re-enter the house, Hazel and Harriet walked briskly up to the door. Cautiously Hazel took hold of the knob, turned it, and pushed the door. An exclamation of surprise, almost of dismay, escaped her lips. She stepped back and, with a look of startled helplessness, announced:

"She's locked the door! We're locked out!"

CHAPTER VI.

BRAVING THE SPOOKS.

"What'll we do now?" Harriet asked with a look that might have appeared comical to one not threatened with the necessity of staying out the rest of the night.

"It never occurred to me that she might do such a thing," said Hazel without attempting to answer her comrade's question. "But I don't know what we would have done if it had occurred to us. We would have gone in with her and we couldn't have got in first very well unless we had run on ahead of her as soon as we saw her headed back for the house."

"Shall we try to get in through one of the windows?" Harriet suggested.

"And run the risk of being shot as burglars?" returned Hazel with a nod of grim fatality. "I happen to know that Aunt Hannah keeps an automatic pistol for that very purpose, and she knows how to handle it like a man."

"Then we must stay out till morning," said Harriet rather dolefully.

"I'm afraid so unless you can make your wits work better than I seem to be able to work mine."

"Let's ring the bell and wake somebody up," Harriet proposed.

"We'd probably wake everybody up and then there'd be a lot of explaining to do. Aunt Hannah'd probably be present clamoring with all the rest for an explanation. What reason could we give that would sound plausible for being out, in this attire, at this time of night without telling a great big fib? We'd probably get ourselves in bad doing that."

Harriet saw the reasonableness of this argument, but she was not ready yet to give up. Of course, they must get back into the house—without revealing the occasion of their going out, if possible, or if not, they must do the best they could.

"Let's go around to Marion and Helen's window and wake them up by throwing pebbles against the glass," was her next proposal. "They'll come down and let us in. Fortunately their room is at the opposite end of the house from your aunt's, and they're not likely to disturb her."

"That sounds pretty good," Hazel said, somewhat encouraged. "Let's go around and see how things look."

They hastened to the west end of the house, but the conditions they found there were anything but favorable. In the first place, the moon was in the south-east, so that the shadow of the house darkened a considerable area of ground to the west. Moreover, a large oak tree completed this disadvantage by throwing a dense shade on the ground near the south-west corner of the house.

"They'd never recognize us in this place," Hazel objected, after a hasty view of the surroundings. "If we succeeded in waking them up, we'd do nothing better than scare them. They'd think we were burglars, or, maybe, ghosts"—the latter suggestion with a little shivering laugh, although it was a warm night.

"Isn't it funny," Harriet observed with almost a shudder, although she laughed derisively, "that we should think about ghosts with the chills running up and down our backs on an occasion like this, although we know there 'ain't no sich things'? My, I'm beginning to feel creepy. I could almost have sworn a spook touched me on the shoulder just then."

"Harriet!" exclaimed Hazel, reprovingly, while she cast an apprehensive glance behind her and then looked back foolishly at her companion. "The first thing we know you'll have a fit of screaming. Now, quit that kind of talk and think up something more sensible for us to do!"

Both girls lapsed into silence several moments, and at length Hazel said:

"I believe the best thing we can do is to go back through the woods to our camp and stay there the rest of the night."

"But we'll be up against the same difficulty in the morning of explaining away our predicament that we'd be up against now if we woke up somebody to let us in," Harriet objected.

"No, we won't," Hazel replied; "not if you let me do the explaining. I think you're afraid we'll meet a ghost in the timber."

"You're just trying to get back at me," Harriet said defiantly. "Go ahead, lead the way, and see if I'm afraid of all the spooks in the timber. But how will that explain our going to the camp at this time of the night?"

"I won't say when we went. I'll just say we went."

"But why?"

"To find out if there really are any ghosts around here. I'll say you gave me a ghost dare and I took you up. That'll be true, won't it? You started by putting me to the test. Now I take you up. Come on!"

Without more ado, Hazel started around the north side, or rear, of the house and led the way along the route over which they had passed twice in the last hour. Harriet followed, asking no more questions, although several which seemed to her of considerable importance persistently puzzled her mind. For instance, she wondered how her audacious leader would explain to the other girls and Mrs. Hutchins how the door happened to be locked from the inside after they had gone out. Again, how would she explain the hasty attire in which they had made their departure? Moreover, what excuse would she give to Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie, the persons in charge of their camp during the absence of

the girls, for this unheralded appearance and resumption of possession.

"Hazel as much as asked me to let her handle this affair and I think I'll let her do it from now on," Harriet mused. "It isn't a matter of life and death, I guess, for anybody concerned. If she bungles things up, I'll have the laugh on her."

Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie lived in the farmhouse belonging to the estate and ran the farm for Mrs. Hutchins. When the Camp Fire Girls arrived and pitched their tents down by Butter Creek in Fern hollow, they were delighted with the suggestion that they take charge of the place whenever the campers wished to be absent. The prospect of occasional tent life during the next few weeks had no little charm for this childless couple, to whom life usually had a good deal of uninteresting sameness day after day. And the delight of this innovation in their experiences became the more substantial when Aunt Hannah purchased an extra tent, and told them to pitch it near the colony of the Camp Fire Girls and occupy it whenever their regular duties did not require their presence elsewhere. Mrs. Hutchins wisely suggested that perhaps it might be well to have a man within calling distance, inasmuch as tramps and other troublesome characters now and then were seen in the neighborhood.

Nothing of the kind, nature or description of a spook or a ghost was seen during the trip

through the woods to the camp in Fern hollow, and in half an hour Hazel and Harriet finished their night's adventure by closing their eyes in slumber on two comfortable, mosquito-protected cots in the colony of tents of Flamingo Camp Fire.

CHAPTER VII.

LETTING HAZEL EXPLAIN.

Fortune and careful calculation favored the plans and purposes of Hazel and Harriet at the break of day. They had stolen quietly into their tent and into bed without arousing the sleeping McKenzies. Under ordinary circumstances, after losing so much sleep, both girls would have slept until long after sunup. But with the present necessities working on their minds, there was no need of an alarm clock to arouse them before it was too late to make their departure unobserved.

Hazel awoke first. The sun had already chased the moon shadows into a ghostly retreat and a multitude of day beams, sliding aslant from the brilliant east, were piercing the foliage with glittering colorful effects. One glance through the canvas flaps in front of the tent was enough. Hazel turned and was about to put her hand on her companion to awaken her, when the latter opened her eyes and sat up.

"Quick, Harriet," she whispered. "We must hurry. It's getting late. We must get back to the house as soon as possible. Maybe we can slip in without being noticed."

But this urging was unnecessary. In a few minutes both girls crept under the side of the tent farthest from the one occupied by Mr.

and Mrs. McKenzie and hastened off toward the trail that led back to Mrs. Hutchins' house. Fortunately neither the farmer nor his wife had yet risen, or they were still within their tent.

Hazel and Harriet arrived back at the house without notable hap or mishap and went direct to the kitchen entrance. They were surprised as well as pleased to find the door unlocked. With curious anticipation they entered, Harriet holding back a little in order that her companion might take the lead, and saying to herself:

"She asked me to let her do the explaining and I'm going to do it."

"Well, fo' the Lor's sake!"

This was the first greeting the girls met with which indicated that any of the occupants of the house had arisen from the night's rest. Of course it was uttered by Minerva, who came out of the dining room just as Hazel and Harriet entered the kitchen.

"Where in the wide worl' did you young misses come from?" the colored servant continued.

"Oh, we've just been out for an early morning constitutional, auntie," Hazel replied.

"My lan', how industrus you folkses be, a-studyin' your history lesson in vacashun an' at five o'clock in the mornin'."

"History lesson! What do you mean by that?" Hazel inquired.

"What you s'pose I mean?" Minerva returned with erudite dignity. "Does you chil-luns think I don't know the constitooshun of the United States am a mighty impo'tant pa't of hist'ry."

The girls laughed merrily.

"Why, Minerva," Hazel exclaimed enthusiastically; "who would ever have thought you would penetrate our secret so cleverly? But now that you are in on it we want you to help us out and keep our secret with us. We don't want the other girls to know what we are up to."

"Bless your heart, chile, I'd do anything fo' you," Minerva declared in a voice whose sincerity could not be mistaken.

"Thank you, Minerva," Hazel said with amused earnestness, as she and Harriet passed into the hall on their way upstairs.

They got back into their room without further personal encounter, and there congratulated themselves and each other on the successful manner in which they had run the gauntlet of difficult circumstances.

"I must say you managed it fine," was Harriet's admiring compliment to her friend as she closed the door; "and you didn't tell a single fib."

"Oh, yes I did," Hazel insisted; "or something of the same character. I boosted along Minerva's historical misunderstanding and thereby told a constitooshunal fib."

An hour and a half later Minerva rang "the

first call for breakfast," and in a short time Aunt Hannah and all the members of the Flamingo Fire were gathered around the capacious fumed-oak table in the large dining-room. While they were eating, Mrs. McKenzie, matron of the camp, called and, without particular ceremony, as was the custom in the Hutchins' household, was ushered into the presence of the assembled guests. She had an announcement of interest to them to make.

"I found this wrist-watch in one of the tents this morning," she said.

"Oh, it's mine," exclaimed Hazel eagerly.

The next instant she would have given a good deal to be able to recall the identification. But what was the use? was her next mental argument. If she denied ownership, someone would recognize it and she would find herself in a difficult position.

"I forgot it and left it under my pillow," she continued. Thank you ever so much, Mrs. McKenzie."

The latter delivered the article of jewelry to its owner and then continued, much to the discomfort of Hazel and Harriet:

"Excuse me for interrupting you further, but there were some strangers in one of the tents last night. I'm afraid they were tramps. They slept there, for this morning the beds were all disarranged. I know all the beds were made yesterday. I don't think they took anything. Luckily they didn't find that watch under the pillow."

This statement produced a commotion among the breakfasters. Uninvited visitors in their camp! What were they—tramps?—gypsies?

Mrs. McKenzie said she did not know. She merely considered it her duty to report conditions as she had found them. She would maintain a more careful watch in the future. Then she departed.

As the matron left the breakfast room, Ethel Zimmerman created no small embarrassment for both Hazel and Harriet by saying:

"Hazel, how in the world did that wrist watch of yours get down there in your tent last night? I'd swear I saw you wearing it yesterday afternoon. I noticed it particularly after my diamond lavalliere was snipped off my neck."

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK TO CAMP.

Whether Hazel would have been able to dodge this issue and avoid the unintended trap that it contained if Aunt Hannah had not come to her rescue is uncertain. Of course, Aunt Hannah had no such purpose in view, but it was very natural for her to remark under the circumstances, with dry-humorous reproach:

"Now, Ethel, are you sure that you didn't see double? Those were pretty exciting times yesterday and it was quite possible for one to make a million mistakes."

This afforded Hazel a pretext for diverting the conversation along another line.

"By the way," she said, "is there a morning paper published here?"

"No," replied her aunt; "only an evening, or rather two of them—the Times and the Journal. There is a good deal of rivalry between them and the Journal got out an extra last night with metropolitan headlines on the sensation of the day."

"I heard some boys calling the papers for sale, but did not get one," said Hazel. "How did you happen to know about it, Auntie?"

"Oh, the Journal called me up and asked for full information as to what we lost. You were here, Hazel, when they called. You heard me talking over the phone about it."

"Yes," said Hazel, "I had forgotten, but remember now. I don't believe I knew who called you. I think I thought it was the police."

"Well," continued Aunt Hannah; "they got out quite an edition—some scoop for a small town, believe me. I had a messenger bring me a copy."

"Where is it?" Hazel asked.

"On the table in the living room, I think," Aunt Hannah replied.

"Excuse me, girls, if I'm all impatience, but I can't eat any more breakfast until I've seen who had their pockets picked, and so forth," Hazel declared. "I suppose several Camp Fire Girls got their names in the paper."

With this announcement, she left her omelette and popovers and skipped through the portiered arch into the next room. In a moment she was back with the paper in her hands.

"Listen, girls, here are the big headlines," she announced; then she read as follows:

"SENSATIONAL FIGHT IS
PICKPOCKETS' TRICK

"Two Score of Crooks Invade Fairberry,
Hypnotize the Town, and Carry
off Immense Swag

"Many Pockets Picked. Much
Jewelry Stolen. Stores
Robbed, too

"Thieves Escape in Automobiles' "

Everybody let breakfast get cold while Hazel read the two columns of thrilling descrip-

tion of the affair that had enraged the whole town. The evidence was declared to be conclusive that an organization of confidence men, perhaps some of the smoothest in the country, had plotted the whole performance with the view to producing the very results that followed. The number of individual losses of money and other valuables suffered by citizens and visitors had not yet been estimated, but apparently it was several hundred, judging from the complaints on every hand. The cash drawers in nine stores were opened and emptied, the loss here being nearly two thousands of dollars, as the receipts of the day had been large.

The news story carried the names of over sixty persons who were known to have lost money and other valuables. Among these were Mrs. Hutchins, Ernestine Johanson, Violet Munday and Ethel Zimmerman. The statement of their losses was accurate, except as to Aunt Hannah, who had said nothing to the reporter about any loss sustained by her aside from the fifteen dollars taken from her hand bag. Consequently no reference was made in the paper to this mysterious loss.

After breakfast all the members of Flamingo Fire returned to their camp and resumed outdoor life. Before leaving the house, however, they renewed their standing invitation to Mrs. Hutchins to join them any time she wished, and she promised to do so later in the day.

Fern Hollow is the beginning of several miles of beautiful scenic depressions and elevations in the hilly country east of Fairberry. The site of this town is comparatively level. Most of the hilly expanse was either covered with timber or suited to grazing. Mrs. Hutchins' farm included about two hundred acres of this kind of land and also some sixty acres of fairly level and more tillable soil.

A stream of water of more than the average depth and width of country creeks flows in fitful rapids and calms along the uneven bed the entire length of the hollow. This stream is the main outlet of Lake Ellyn, which is fed by numerous springs and spring-water rivulets on three sides. Years ago it was given the name Butter creek by some facetious patriarch perhaps because of the extravagant amount of churning it had to do along the course of more than half a mile after it left the lake, or, to be absolutely fair, in honor of the herds of milch cows who browsed among the multitudes of buttercups that grew along the banks.

The camp of Flamingo Fire was a short distance up the fern-decorated hillside from Butter creek about a quarter of a mile from the lake. This site was selected because of its beauty, which exceeded even that of the picturesque scene along the lakeshore. Nine white canvas tents pitched close together on the side of the hill comprised the shelter of the camp. One of these tents was the kitchen

and commissary headquarters, another was occupied occasionally by Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie, particularly while the girls were absent any considerable length of time from the camp, the other seven tents were the sleeping quarters of the thirteen members of the Camp Fire and their Guardian.

Most of the ferns of Fern Hollow were in the lower part of the ravine or gully, many of them along the banks of Butter creek. Here and there near the stream were small meadow-like areas where butter-cups grew in rich abundance, variegated with a plentiful sprinkling of violets, shooting stars, anemones, cowslips and Sweet Williams.

Much of the scattered tree growth near the stream was stunted and bushy. Farther up on either side of the creek, the bushes were larger and thicker and the arborial growths more substantial. Altogether this little valley, with its picturesque surroundings, was a beautiful sight and undoubtedly would have been exploited by revenue seekers as a summer resort if the lake above had been large enough for extensive boating, bathing, and fishing. But even under present conditions there was fishing for the town in both the lake and in numerous pockets of the creek, while certain boys living in the vicinity maintained a boathouse and two or three boats for their own use and, at a small fee by the hour, for the occasional public.

Several years before, an enterprising individual with more enterprise, money and imagination than sound business judgment, attempted, in a small way, to establish a paying summer resort in this place. He leased a site and privileges from Mr. Hutchins and erected a sort of pioneer hotel of decidedly rustic aspect and a dozen portable cottages. He operated the place two seasons, enjoying a considerable patronage, but his expenditures exceeded his income to such an extent that he found it necessary to discontinue business in order to avoid bankruptcy.

The portables had been removed, but the hotel, a small affair, made principally of logs, was still standing. To the girl campers, from the day of their arrival in Fern Hollow, this long deserted hostelry was an object of no small interest. It was covered with vines and moss and surrounded with a dense growth of small trees and shrubbery. Over one end drooped a huge cottonwood tree, which had grown with a considerable lean toward the building. This tree, which was over 100 feet tall and five or six feet in diameter at the base, undoubtedly was no more than a sapling at the time the hotel was constructed.

One of the first objects of the Camp Fire Girls' exploration in the hollow was this renatured fiasco of civilization. Perhaps the fascination of the love that nature seemed to have for this object of poetic desolation had something to do with their selection of a

camping site within a few hundred feet of it. At any rate, their first visit to the old log house resulted in unexpressed resolutions on the part of the visitors to come again. The interior was in a remarkable state of preservation. Even the floors were fairly sound and the steps leading from the first story to the second, after a little repairing, could be climbed with safety.

The first weekly meeting of the Camp Fire was held one evening in this place. There was a huge fireplace in the main room on the first floor and in this the girls built a roaring fire which lighted up the room in a picturesque manner. This fireplace and the entire chimney constituted one of the most substantial elements of the building, being constructed of bowlders of all sizes laid in Portland cement.

Into these surroundings the members of Flamingo Camp Fire returned following the apparent closing of the incidents that signalized the most eventful Fourth of July any of them had ever known. There had been nothing inspiring in these experiences and every one of the girls hoped heartily that they would have no more of this nature. When people go camping, as a rule, about the last thing they expect is a thrilling sensation of any sort. But the future of these girls seemed to be mapped out with promises of startling events, the one hopeful feature of which recognized their apparent ability to pull through with triumphant success.

CHAPTER IX.

DISSECT AND ANALYZE GOSSIP

Four days of delightful camp life in and about Fern Hollow served to alleviate to a large extent the disturbing effects of the Fourth of July experiences of Flamingo Camp Fire, so that the girls became sufficiently composed and confident as to the future to congratulate themselves on the return of normal conditions. The day following the Fourth was Thursday, and until well along in the afternoon the main topic of conversation was the shocking affairs that interrupted the patriotic celebrations. But the more they discussed it the more unsatisfactory were the results, until finally Miss Ladd, the Guardian, swung the whole matter around for an entirely different view from a new angle.

"Girls," she said as they seated themselves in a shady spot on the bank of Butter creek, about a mile down stream from the camp "I have permitted this talk to go on as long as it has with a purpose in view. I could see plainly where it was leading to—nowhere, confusion. Now I want to call your attention to what has been uppermost in your minds during all of your discussion of this affair.

"It is this: sheer curiosity as to who lost money and other valuables in yesterday's un-

scheduled event and the individual amounts or articles lost.

"This curiosity has popped up here and there along the line. And where you had the desired information, you turned it over and over and over and inside out to be certain that no feature of interest escaped your attention. Moreover, this purposeless curiosity has served to dissipate your day's outing. It has unsettled you to such an extent that you have wandered here and there with little idea of what you wished to do except to get out and flap your wings.

"Now, my suggestion is that henceforth you taboo that affair as a subject of discussion, at least except here and there incidentally, until there is some real occasion for its coming up again. In other words, train yourselves to throw off any sensation as soon as you see that it is leading you around in a circle all the time."

"In still other words," broke in Ernestine Johanson; "you caught us in a vertigo of gossip and thought you would let us go the limit so that we couldn't help looking foolish when you called our attention to what we were doing. Girls, I'm ready to admit with all of you that we have been foolish. Let's vote the subject into oblivion until there appears to be a chance of its getting us somewhere."

"I second the motion," said Violet Munday.

"All in favor say aye," proposed Estelle Adler.

There was a chorus of "ayes".

"Contrary, no."

Not a "no" was uttered.

"Carried unanimously. The subject is taboo."

"Here comes an automobile," announced Azalia Atwood a moment after this subject had been disposed of in a parliamentary manner.

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated. A highway ran through the timber a quarter of a mile down stream, and the driver had opened a gate and driven into the clearing, which extended almost up to the place where the Camp Fire Girls were resting. It was difficult for the driver to find a passageway over the acreage of tree stumps, and undoubtedly he would have found the task impossible if he had not kept close to the bank of the stream. The auto had not traversed half the distance between the road and the resting place of the girls before Hazel recognized it and exclaimed:

"Oh, that's Aunt Hannah; it's her machine. She must have been up at the camp and learned from Mrs. McKenzie where we were."

Hazel's surmise was correct, as Mrs. Hutchins explained after leaving the automobile and joining the girls.

"What have you been doing all day?" she inquired.

"Oh, just tramping around and getting lots of fresh air and exercise and, and—" Hazel

said, and as she hesitated for a completion of her sentence, Harriet Newcomb finished it for her thus:

"And gossiping."

"Gossiping," repeated the woman with a glance around of not very severe reproof over the glasses that pinched her slightly aquiline nose. "I'm surprised. What were you gossiping about?"

"What happened on the Fourth and who were the victims of the pickpockets and thieves," Hazel replied.

"Why was that gossip?"

"I don't suppose it was at first, but finally we got to the end of our string, and there were only two things for us to do, stop or go all over it again. Well, we didn't stop, and the first thing we knew we were going round and around in a circle."

"Yes, and we did a lot of gushing over it, didn't we, girls?" interposed Marie Crismore. "I was one of the offenders, I admit it. When we got worked up to a high pitch of feeling, some of us would cry out, 'Wasn't it awful?' 'Wasn't it terrible!' 'Did you ever hear anything like it!'"

"Yes, that's real gossip," Mrs. Hutchins agreed, taking off her poplin automobile hat and settling herself as comfortably as possible on a grassy spot, which two of the girls cleared for her by removing a scattered litter of dead twigs. "And that brings to my mind a very

interesting subject. Did you ever ask yourselves just what gossip is?"

"It's tattling, tale bearing, idle talk," volunteered Juliette Hyde, who had made considerable study of the dictionary for class work. "We had to study up on that when we were reading 'Much Ado About Nothing' in English."

"All right, you're just the girl I want to quiz," said Mrs. Hutchins with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "By the way, I used to be a school teacher myself."

"Yes, Aunt Hannah used to teach in a country school, didn't you, auntie," said Hazel.

"That I did, right on the outskirts of the village of Podunk, although that wasn't its name," she replied. "And do you know, girls, with all due respect to the advanced character of the high-brow institutions of today, I believe I learned some things in the middle-ground between here and the back woods that few people learn here. For instance, I believe I acquired a broader understanding of gossip than the average critic of gossip."

"Hooray! I believe Mrs. Hutchins is going to give us something new," Harriet Newcomb interposed, leaning forward eagerly.

"Wait till you hear what I have to say," suggested Aunt Hannah. "I may have some questions to ask to find out if you get me. My experience has taught me that the average critic of gossip gossips when he criticises."

"There, what did I tell you?" Harriet

exclaimed. "Did anybody here ever hear anything like that before?"

Apparently nobody had.

"All right, Miss Newcomb," continued Mrs. Hutchins, "now I am going to put some questions to you. Do you believe what I said is true?"

Harriet gazed thoughtfully a moment or two at her inquisitor, then replied:

"Yes, I do."

"Why?"

"Well," the girl said slowly; "much criticism of gossip is gossip because it hasn't any particular purpose in view. It consists usually of passing remarks just like gossip, other gossip, if you please."

"It sounds better as a rule, doesn't it?" Mrs. Hutchins inquired.

"Yes, but it's only a little higher class of gossip unless you can offer some suggestion that will get the gossips busy on something that will keep their minds off of gossip."

"Very good. Now will you tell me how many kinds of subjects there are in the world that one can gossip about?"

"As many subjects as there are in the world," Harriet replied quickly. "I've heard people gossip about the European war and about the weather. That was when they just wanted to say something, but didn't know anything about their subject."

"How is it possible for one to gossip about the weather?"

"Oh, goodness, I've done that lots of times," Harriet confessed, smiling reminiscently. "But that was before I became a Camp Fire Girl. I used to be complaining about the weather all the time, saying what a cold, wet, hot, uncomfortable day it was. That was gossip pure and simple. It didn't get me anywhere. I didn't know what to do to make me comfortable. But the Camp Fire organization has solved the problem of weather gossip and many other kinds of gossip. Why, our exercises, our studies, our many little occupations that we work out, are just the things we need to keep us from criticising everything that doesn't rub like velvet against us. Do you know, really, that a hot day isn't hot when you're deeply interested in something?"

"That is simply fine," declared Mrs. Hutchins with deliberate emphasis on each word. "I surely didn't expect a lecture like that from so young a girl. If there are many others who can say such things, I'll have to take back what I said about getting a broader understanding of gossip than the average critic of gossip. You even added something to my view of the matter when you introduced the subject of meteorological gossip."

"I didn't know that I —" began Harriet. Then she stopped and admitted her bewilderment with a puzzled look on her face.

"What is meteorological gossip?" Hazel asked.

"Can't some of you girls figure it out?"

Aunt Hannah inquired with a searching look into the face of every one of her young guests.

"I can't," several of them admitted.

"If Harriet can't tell what it means, there's no hope for a definition from Flamingo Camp Fire," said Violet Munday. "She knows more big words than all the rest of us put together."

"Don't be in too big a hurry to confess ignorance for the entire Fire," Miss Ladd interposed quickly. "If none of you girls can answer that question, I think I can."

"Isn't all gossip like a meteor?" inquired Azalia Atwood so naively that both Miss Ladd and Mrs. Hutchins laughed heartily. The others, still being in ignorance on the subject of meteorology, failed to catch the joke.

"The trouble is, Azalia," said Miss Ladd; "that you have a limited understanding of the word meteor. You are thinking of it as a ball of fire flying across the heavens at night. That is a specific meaning of the word. The general meaning, not popularly understood, is any phenomenon of the atmosphere, such as rain, snow, hail."

"If it rained frogs and angleworms, the frogs and angleworms would be meteors," suggested Julietta Hyde.

"Surely," Miss Ladd replied, with an accent of disappointment. "However, Julietta by that suggestion you are getting the other girls off the track. Now, can't somebody answer the question?"

"Oh, I know what it is!" suddenly exclaimed

Violet Munday, clapping her hands eagerly. "I remember reading the other day that the weather man of this section is one of the most skilled meteorologists in the country."

"Then what is meteorological gossip?" Mrs. Hutchins asked.

"Gossip about the weather man," Violet replied, but the chorus of laughter that greeted her definition proved she had missed her opportunity.

"It's gossip about the weather," cried several of the girls, and both Miss Ladd and Mrs. Hutchins looked very well pleased.

"Now," said Aunt Hannah, "I've delayed an important matter longer than I should have delayed it. I really came here on a meteorological mission, not gossip. The weather report that reached Fairberry today predicts a storm for tonight. It is likely to be a pretty severe one, with a strong wind. I thought I had better come here and suggest that you girls come back to the house for the night."

"Camp Fire Girls are not afraid of storms," said Ruth Hazelton warmly.

"Not much are they," declared Ernestine Johanson. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Hutchins, but I for one am in favor of sticking to our tents. I like a thunderstorm."

"So do I, with lots of lightning in it—but not too near," said Katherine Crane.

"Let's invite Aunt Hannah to stay with us," Hazel suggested.

"Just as you say, girls," said Mrs. Hutchins.

"I'm not afraid if you're not, only I thought it might be more comfortable in my house."

"Camp Fire Girls don't always look for comfort first," vouched Ethel Zimmerman.

"If there's going to be a storm, we'd better hurry back to camp and see that everything is ready for it," Miss Ladd suggested.

Mrs. Hutchins instructed the driver to take the machine back to the garage. Then she and the Camp Fire prepared for their walk back up Fern hollow along Butter creek to the place where the little colony of tents were pitched.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNWELCOME CALLER.

Half an hour later they were back in camp and busy getting everything in condition for the expected storm. Mrs. Hutchins said that the weather report which reached Fairberry that morning read thus:

"Rain tonight. Strong wind from south-east. Not much change in temperature."

She had a Philadelphia newspaper, too, which contained a long weather "story", telling of hurricanes on the Atlantic ocean and heavy, storm-laden winds blowing inland. Hope was expressed, however, that the force of the winds would be pretty well broken before they got far in from the coast.

The sky was still clear, and there was no indication as yet of any impending disturbance of the elements. Hardly a breath of air was stirring. The sun was still well up in the heavens. The day was warm but not oppressive.

The first work of the girls on their arrival back at the camp had to do with securing the tents against possible tearing loose by a strong wind. Every guy rope was tested, as well as the hooked pegs in the ground to which they were fastened. Special attention was given to the guy ropes attached to the flies, which were intended to protect the under canvas;

from the wind and the rain, and to smaller ropes that held the drop flaps close to the ground to prevent the rain from beating in.

After this work was completed, three of the girls began the preparation of supper. All the members of the Camp Fire did duty in shifts in the kitchen, and this was their day.

The supper of creamed dried beef, potatoes, peach sauce, cocoa, and bread and butter was over early, and the dishes, principally aluminum, were washed and put away. Still there was no sign of the storm promised by the weather man. The sun was two hours high, and the girls decided to gather a supply of wood with which to build a bonfire at dusk. It was not to be a ceremonial fire, so everybody, Wood Gatherers, Fire Builders, Torch Bearers, got busy. In half an hour, Miss Ladd called "enough", and the industrious gatherers of dead and dying tree limbs contemplated with satisfaction the abundant results of their labor.

"That ought to make things look pretty cheerful after we light a match to it tonight," said Miss Ladd. "Unless we have a regular cloudburst all the water that falls on that bonfire will go back up in steam."

"It'll make it pretty hot around here," Katherine Crane suggested.

"Maybe it won't be so bad if the rain cools the atmosphere," said Helen Nash.

"But the weather report said 'not much

change in temperature,' " Ethel Zimmerman reminded.

"Oh, that has no reference to the cooling of the atmosphere by rainfall," said Marion Stanlock. "For instance, you can cool the atmosphere in your home by turning the hose on the front porch, but by doing that you don't lower the temperature, as the weather bureau looks at it.

"Well, we'll drive the mosquitos away and keep the bats at a distance," Hazel Edwards suggested.

At this juncture the conversation was interrupted by the sound of an automobile moving along the drive that ran from the main road half a mile away, through the timber, to the abandoned hotel. As it stopped, a man stepped out of the machine and advanced toward the group of Camp Fire Girls.

He was a middle-aged man of medium height and weight, with a stubby sandy moustache and wearing a light gray suit and a Bangkok hat.

"I am looking for Mrs. Hutchins," he announced, lifting his hat and bowing with an urbane ease that seemed to indicate a kind of professional society practice. He waited for a reply, still in an attitude of conventional politeness.

"I am Mrs. Hutchins," said Aunt Hannah, rising from a camp chair on which she had been resting from her walk while the girls gathered firewood.

"I hope you will excuse this intrusion," said the man, advancing a few steps nearer and still holding his hat in his hand, "but I came to Fairberry from Baltimore especially to see you on important business, and I was told at your home that you might not return to the house for two or three days. I could not very well wait that length of time, so hired an automobile and came here."

The other members of the camping party, realizing that the business interview sought by the man might require privacy, withdrew to a respectful distance. Then suddenly Hazel pointed off toward the southeast and said:

"See there, girls. That must be the storm coming up over the horizon now."

The others looked in the direction indicated, and there was a chorus of concurrence in Hazel's suggestion. Evidently the clouds were moving very rapidly, for even as the girls looked, it seemed that they could see the white fringed rim of heavy black sky-mist growing larger every moment.

"There's a mighty strong wind behind those clouds," said Miss Ladd. "I'm afraid we'd better not build a fire tonight. If it should prove to be a big wind storm without much rain, it might do some serious damage when it got to playing with the fire."

While the other girls were occupied in watching the storm, Hazel stole a glance at her aunt and the unexpected visitor. For some reason that she could not explain she

felt that the man was there for no purpose friendly to Aunt Hannah, and her glance toward them in no wise tended to allay her suspicion. The two were engaged in earnest conversation and the woman's attitude evidently was a physical reinforcement of a vigorous protest.

With a little shudder of apprehension, Hazel was about to turn about and rejoin the girls in their conversation about the storm, when Aunt Hannah motioned to her as if beckoning her to approach the spot where the interview was taking place. The girl did as requested, and as she came within a few feet of her aunt and the stranger she heard the former say to the man:

"That is absolutely all I can say on the subject. I hope you won't bother me about this matter again, for it won't do you or me any good. Absolutely no more interviews. See my attorney. I must bid you good-day now."

The man turned and left, a little stiffly, it seemed, but with at least an effort at his customary politeness. Then Mrs. Hutchins turned to her niece and said:

"Hazel, will you occupy a tent with me tonight? I've got something heavy weighing on my mind, and I simply must take some friendly member of the family into my confidence."

Hazel promised to do as Aunt Hannah requested.

CHAPTER XI.

A STORM AND A STORY.

After the first clear warning in the south-eastern sky, the storm came rapidly, driven by a furious wind. The clouds were dark, almost black, and here and there were streaked or fringed with grayish white. Their advance across the heavens appeared as rapid as that of a train moving across a prairie in the distance.

The Camp Fire Girls, their Guardian, and Mrs. Hutchins all remained outside until the first drops of rain fell. In accord with the Guardian's suggestion, it was decided not to light a bonfire, lest some of the embers be blown onto the tents.

Hazel and Mrs. Hutchins occupied the tent of Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie, who had returned to their house near the cultivated portion of the farm. Darkness settled rapidly, and they lighted several candles, which illuminated the sheltered inclosure very well. Then they seated themselves on camp chairs beside one of the cots, and Aunt Hannah introduced the subject that was weighing heavily on her mind, her narrative being punctuated with flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, while the rain poured down in torrents on the fly of the tent.

"You will remember this evening as perhaps

you will remember none other in your entire girlhood," she began. "And there is a peculiar reason for my prophecy. If I had been planning every detail ahead, I would not have selected a stormy night in a semi-wilderness as time and place for telling my story.

"There is more in the psychology of a storm than most people suspect. I know this from a very impressionable experience. Many of the things heard, seen and done by me in my childhood days I cannot recall now without some of the awe-associations of a stormy night in the country. Therefore I would suggest that you attempt to fix your mind calmly on the unromantic reality of things in order that you may recall this scene in after years as rationally as possible."

"I surely must look for something unusual and interesting after an introduction of that kind," Hazel interposed. "I suppose I am too young to get the full meaning of what you say, and yet, I can't help looking for something very much out of the ordinary."

"Your expectation is well warranted," Aunt Hannah replied; "and I'll leave it for you to decide as to whether I have overdone the thing in my introductory warning.

"Well, here goes. The trouble I'm in has a double cause: I have lost something and I have forgotten something. If I could remember what I have forgotten, the loss, probably, would not be serious. If I had what I lost, the

lapse of memory, probably, would be of no consequence."

"That doesn't sound as if you overdid your warning," Hazel said with a smile as she leaned forward in an attitude of deepened interest.

"I'll go back to the beginning of my story," Mrs. Hutchins continued. "Your Uncle Edmund, who died eighteen months ago, was trustee of an estate amounting to more than \$100,000 and, to secure his bondsmen, scheduled nearly all his property, including this farm. The chief beneficiary of the estate is a child, a grandnephew of his, who is in the custody of another relative in Baltimore.

"Well, at the death of my husband, the trusteeship passed to me. But before his death there was a period of several months during which it was evident that something was weighing heavily on his mind and troubling him greatly. I tried to find out what it was, but was unsuccessful for some time. At last I learned that there was a minor heir and legatee of the estate, who was trying to make trouble, and he was succeeding in annoying your uncle far more than I had any idea. In fact, although I did not realize it at the time, your uncle's mental balance was wavering.

"The estate consisted principally of mortgage bonds, only a few of which were registered. Your uncle kept them at first in a vault in Baltimore, but a few months before he died he brought them to Fairberry and put them in

a local vault. I did not know this or I would have suspected something wrong, for the small vaults here are hardly the best places for keeping a fortune of that size and character. On his death bed he informed me of this act and also that he had moved the securities from the local vault. He told me where he put them, but I was in such a state of distress that it made no impression on my mind. It seems to me that he said he buried the papers, but for the life of me I can't recall where it was. I did remember, however, that he said he had left a sealed letter addressed to me at one of the local banks, with instruction for its delivery to me in the event of his death. This letter, he said, contained full information as to where I would find the papers of this trust estate, and I suppose the fact that I knew he had left such information caused me to pay little attention to his oral statement as to where the papers were.

"A day or two after his death the letter was delivered to me, but I was in no condition of mind to pay any attention to business. I opened the letter, saw that it dealt with business pure and simple and laid it aside, intending to take the matter up when I felt better. But when I looked for it a few days later I could not find it.

"For a year and a half I hunted the house high and low for that letter. Meanwhile relatives of the heir began to ask questions as the usual remittances failed to come. I was

in a quandary and, I suppose, foolishly evaded the issue, hoping to find the letter that would tell me where the missing papers were. They became more insistent and I began to make remittances from my own resources. But their suspicions were aroused, and a demand was made upon me for an accounting. Realizing that the bond given by my husband and myself was ample security, I refused. But it seems that some of my husband's relatives did not like me very well and were bent on making trouble for me. They hired a lawyer, a Mr. Anderson, the man you saw here a little while ago, and the systematic course of hypocritically polite annoyance that he began indicated the kind of instructions he had received from his clients. That was the nature of his mission here today. He threatened to start proceedings against me in the local courts if I did not voluntarily give up my trusteeship and turn over the property in my charge to another trustee whom his clients wish to be named. I refused.

"Haden't you ever seen this lawyer before he called today?" Hazel asked.

"No, I hadn't," Aunt Hannah replied. "His annoyances had been conducted through the mails and through a local attorney, the most unscrupulous member of the bar in Fairberry."

"Haven't you a lawyer of your own who advises you in this matter?"

"To be sure I have, and he knows the whole

situation. I've directed this man, Anderson, and his local representative to communicate with him, but they refused to do it. I've been turning Anderson's letters over to my lawyer, and now he has come to see me personally."

"Didn't you ever find that missing letter?" Hazel inquired.

"Oh, yes, I did," Aunt Hannah said apologetically, as if suddenly recovering from a lapse of memory. "And where do you think I found it? The simplest place on earth. It had slipped down behind the facing of the mantel over the fireplace. I found it on the Fourth of July, shortly before we left the house to go to the square where the celebration was held. I was looking for a little gold pin that I had missed and got up on a chair to get a better view over the mantel. Then for the first time I observed that the mantel was sprung out slightly from the fireplace. Like a flash the suggestion came to me that that was where the missing letter might be and I looked eagerly down into the crevice. Sure enough, a white paper edge was in plain view. I got a hatpin and began to pick at it. Presently I drew out the missing letter written by my husband.

"I opened it, but quickly discovered something that my first glance, months ago, had failed to impress on my mind. The handwriting of my husband, particularly in the latter part of the letter, was so nervous and pot-hooked as to be almost illegible. It was but

another indication of his mental condition during the last few months before he died. I saw at once that it would require considerable study to decipher it. So I put it into my handbag, hoping to find an opportunity to study it over in the course of the day, or possibly to see my lawyer and enlist his aid."

"And that letter was the article stolen from your handbag which caused you such distress," Hazel exclaimed, unable longer to repress her excited suspicion.

"Exactly," Aunt Hannah replied; "and with it went my husband's secret, which he told to me and which I forgot."

CHAPTER XII.

A SEQUEL TO THE SECRET.

"But there is a sequel to this secret," Aunt Hannah continued after a few moments' pause. "I haven't told you who the minor legatee was that tried so hard to make trouble for your uncle over the estate. His name was Percy Teich, a son of my husband's half-brother, Orland Teich.

"Percy was about twenty-five years old and a circus man by profession. I never liked him or his father, although I had seen them only a few times. Orland died before your Uncle Edmund. Percy visited at our house half a dozen times during the last ten or twelve years, but he always came uninvited and remained only a short while.

"But that isn't the sequel I referred to. It is something more interesting. When those two scoundrels began their pretended fight on the public square yesterday to get the people worked up to such a pitch of excitement that the pickpockets might find a field of easy victims, I thought there was something familiar in the face and form of the smaller man. I watched him closely to determine if my suspicions were true or not. The longer I watched, the more confident I became that I was not mistaken. My suspicion was strongly reinforced as the evidence of his athletic skill

increased. I looked carefully for a good view of his features. Then when he sprang up on the shoulders of the larger man and balanced himself there for half a minute, I needed no further evidence. Nobody but an acrobat could have performed such a feat, and, moreover, while he stood balanced on the shoulders of his supposed adversary, I got an excellent view of his countenance. There was no doubt of it—he was my late husband's nephew, Percy Teich."

"Why, he must be a professional crook," said Hazel, shocked at the idea of such a person's being a relative of hers.

"Of course he is," Aunt Hannah replied. "And you don't know what humiliation I felt at the disgrace it must heap upon me if the fact should become known that a near relative of my husband's was one of the leaders in that awful affair."

"What I can't understand," Hazel continued, "is why a man of his ability and skill should throw away his opportunities for an honorable success and devote his time and energies to such an unprincipled occupation."

"Ah," returned Aunt Hannah slowly and with a significant accent; "right there is where you have much to learn about life. Women, as a rule, don't learn much of this phase of human affairs, or if they do the knowledge they acquire is so contrary to their feminine ideals that the result is usually bewilderment and intolerant confusion. But the new wom-

an is not going to be so easily confused. Schooled in a new civic education, of which the Camp Fire Girls' organization is a worthy exponent, she will have so much strength and system of character and intelligence in her make-up that, that—well—it will be a cold day when she will be guilty of marrying a penniless title or quitting high school to go on the stage."

"I'm not sure that I see the connection, Auntie," Hazel said.

"The connection is entirely abstract," Mrs. Hutchins answered. "I mean to say that the girl with a good common-sense education gathers much more rapidly an understanding and appreciation of the ways of the world than the girl who is satisfied with a butterfly existence."

"In other words, to get back to our subject, do you mean that a girl of ordinarily good intelligence ought to understand why it is possible for men of strong and even brilliant intellects to be thoroughly dishonest?" Hazel inquired.

"I wouldn't say that she ought to understand why such a thing is possible," Aunt Hannah replied; "but she ought to know that it is true, and also that it is possible for women to make the same big mistakes in life that many men make. If I had taken this thing as seriously before your Uncle Edmund died, I would, first of all, have had more interest in my husband's business affairs before his mind

began to weaken; moreover, I might even have been able to supply for him a business companionship that would have prevented him from slipping into a mental collapse. And if I had been more alert to the dangers that are ambushed about important duties postponed, I would have forgotten all about the Fourth of July and the celebration until that letter was deciphered. Now, I am afraid it has fallen into the hands of the very person who would make use of it to my hurt more quickly than anyone else. He may already have those securities in his possession."

"You mean Percy Teich?"

"I do."

"But how could he have gotten hold of the letter?"

"You forget, Hazel, that he was one of the band of bad men who evidently worked together in a thoroughly organized manner. Undoubtedly they compared notes afterward, and if the scoundrel who stole my handbag kept the letter that he took out of it, he may quite possibly have produced that letter at the meeting where they exchanged mutual congratulations over their success.

"But why should they want to keep such a thing as a letter?" Hazel inquired.

"Now you are exhibiting some real ignorance of the ways of the world," said Aunt Hannah with a smile. "Don't you see that it is very likely that a professional crook, who makes a study of his business the way those

men evidently did, would like nothing better than to get possession of the private correspondence of a wealthy woman which might contain tips of how to get his hands onto some of her money?"

"You surely are a wise woman," Hazel remarked admiringly. "Really, auntie, I don't believe you are to be blamed for this misfortune. It is just plain bad luck, which can overtake anybody."

"Now, Hazel," protested Mrs. Hutchins severely, "just on account of that remark of yours, I'm going to give you a lecture. Get ready, for it's going to be right straight from the shoulder."

CHAPTER XIII.

HAZEL ASKS A QUESTION.

"I shall be glad to listen to a lecture from my wise Aunt Hannah," was the reply with which Hazel greeted her relative's announcement. "It seems to me that you have given me one pretty good lecture already this evening. What is the next one about?"

"It is about luck," was the other's reply. "You introduced the subject in such a serious manner that it seems you must believe in luck. How about it, Hazel? Do you really?"

The girl smiled and hesitated. She did not know just how to reply. She saw at once that, no matter which way she answered the question, Aunt Hannah was certain to demand a reason. To her this thing called luck had always been foolish whether one believed in it or not. If one believed in it, he should admit it, laugh, and forget it. If he did not believe in luck, he should say so, laugh and forget it.

"Why, yes, I suppose I believe in luck," she said. "I don't see how you can get away from it. You know some people are born in the best of home surroundings while others are born in hovels. Isn't that luck?"

"Not in the least," Aunt Hannah replied. "I don't want to try to force you to believe something you can't see, but I want to say this: there is a reason for everything. You

must assume this as invariably true if you would live the most satisfactory life. Often we can't see the reason of things, but, in so far as we are able to observe and analyze, reason is at the very foundation of human existence. The idea of fortune is directly opposed to reason.

"There is no such thing as chance or accident. You slip and fall, perhaps sprain your ankle. You call it an accident. No such thing. There was a little ice on the sidewalk. You didn't notice it. If you had seen it, probably you would have avoided it or properly measured your step on it.

"Many people would term my experience yesterday a great misfortune. It wasn't. Because it hit me so hard, so unexpectedly, you yourself are disposed to look at it in this light. The trouble was, I didn't use my head as vigorously as I should have used it. In the first place, it was foolish for me to carry that paper with me in my handbag. That was really silly. Think of it! If I had carried \$100,000 worth of jewels around in my handbag for several hours in a big crowd, you would have called me insane. And yet, I carried around with me a paper that told the secret of the whereabouts of that much wealth. And if it had been \$100,000 worth of jewels that had been stolen from my handbag, few persons would think of me as an unfortunate victim deserving of universal sympathy. People might say, 'too bad,' but they would also shake their

heads as though they thought I must be in my second childhood."

Hazel's eyes were now sparkling with interest in spite of the deep concern she felt at her aunt's predicament.

"Why, Aunt Hannah!" she exclaimed; "I never heard anybody talk like that before. I can see readily enough that what you say is true, but I am all confusion. I can't understand why we should look so differently at two things which really amount to one and the same thing."

"The reason is this," the lecturer replied. "We look through magnifying glasses at the ideas that dazzle our minds. There is very little to dazzle the mind's eye in a scrap of paper telling where a \$100,000 mortgage bond is hidden. It is very interesting, but you could carry it around sewed up in the lining of your coat for a month with perfect propriety. But carry around the \$100,000 mortgage bond in precisely the same place and condition and the person who finds it out is likely to think of reporting you to the authorities for a mental examination.

"I don't know, Hazel, if you will understand why I should talk this way to you, but there really are several good reasons. First, since my husband died, there has been nobody to whom I could go with my troubles and my problems and get sympathy. About the only person with whom I have discussed these things is my lawyer, but my talks with him,

of course, are of entirely different character from this one.

"Matters had come almost to a crisis before I found that letter behind the mantel. You don't know how it cheered me. And then to think that I let the whole thing slip through my hands by the most foolish conduct one could be guilty of! It is almost more than I can bear. It will probably mean, Hazel, that I will lose practically everything I have in the world.

"No, not that bad!" Hazel exclaimed in deep distress. "Didn't you report to the police the fact that you recognized one of those Fourth of July crooks? They may find him and recover that letter for you."

"Yes, I did," Aunt Hannah replied. "I took the matter up with my lawyer this morning and we had an interview with the chief of police. It is my one hope, but a very slim one, I am afraid."

Hazel was silent for a minute or two. She was thinking hard. The rapid succession of events was racing back and forth in her mind more furiously even than the storm outside. By this time the thrashing of the elements had subsided considerably and the storm had settled down to a heavy pour with less lightning and thunder and with a less tortuous drive of wind. Mrs. Hutchins sat quietly with her arms folded and gazing despondently into the opposite corner of the tent.

Presently Hazel spoke again, and the result

of her utterance was startling, to say the least. She seemed to change the subject entirely, and it may be that this seeming change, together with the apparent irrelevance of her words, contributed much to the weirdness of their effect.

"Aunt Hannah," she said, "do you ever walk in your sleep?"

Aunt Hannah started forward so suddenly that it seemed as if she would leap out of her chair.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STORY CUT SHORT.

"Why do you ask that question, Hazel?" Mrs. Hutchins inquired after she recovered from the shock which her niece's question had given her.

"I don't know exactly," the girl replied. "At least, I don't want to answer your question until I get a little more information on the subject from you."

"Why not?"

"Because you might not see any connection between your walking in your sleep and the matters we have been talking about."

"All right; I'll wait. Go ahead."

"Do you ever walk in your sleep?" Hazel repeated.

"I haven't of recent years," Aunt Hannah replied; "but I used to walk in my sleep a good deal when I was a girl. I am going to tell you a secret regarding that subject, which no doubt will interest you very much. There is no particular reason why it should be a secret, but I am not much of a woman to talk about my personal affairs, and since I probably have not mentioned it for twenty or thirty years, I suppose my friends have all forgotten it.

"I was born and reared on a farm in Pennsylvania. The house in which we lived was a large picturesque colonial structure, containing everything from an oil portrait of George

Washington to an attic well populated with ghosts. We children, of course, were the creators of that colony of disembodied spirits, but they were very real creatures to our minds. There were six of us, three girls and three boys, and we were all of us possessed with the weird imaginations of childhood. I suppose these notions of ours were peculiar to the time and the neighborhood in which we lived.

"I was what was known as a 'flighty child,' particularly when I was ill. Just a little fever accompanying some child's illness was enough to send me away on the wings of the most fantastic dreams. Many a time the wild manner in which I would sit up or stand up in bed and utter the most ridiculous ideas in my sleep frightened my parents into apprehensions of serious consequences to me. They and the family physician pronounced me abnormally nervous, but, parenthetically, I do not regard myself as especially nervous now.

"Well, these peculiarities of mine developed to such an extent I had to be watched closely every time a simple little child's illness came upon me. But this grew to be quite a joke with my brothers and sisters. My flighty words and actions in my sleep were about the funniest thing they ever heard or saw. It became so common an affair that they would wait for it with great glee and next day would twit me about the ridiculous things I did and said in my sleep. For a few years matters

continued in this way, and then I seemed to outgrow my flighty tendency, or habit, or whatever you choose to call it. I suppose a year went by without any further experience of this kind until one night I awoke and found myself out of bed, standing somewhere with a wall of darkness all about me except for a patch of faint starlight at a window several yards away.

"I stood very still for I know not how long, wondering whether I was awake or asleep. As the conviction crept over me stronger and stronger that I was really awake and had been walking in my sleep, I tried harder and harder to convince myself that I was in the land of dreams. But at last I realized that there was no use trying to delude myself, and I began to study my surroundings to determine how I was to find my way back to my bed.

"I must have spent fifteen minutes trying to find out where I was. I am sure it took half of that time to convince me that I was not in my own room. I made my way over to the window, feeling every inch carefully lest I fall down a stairway, and even when I got there I had difficulty in determining in what part of the house I was. But finally I got my bearings, and where do you suppose I found myself? I was in an unfurnished room at the end of the house farthest from my bedroom and I could now determine that when I awoke I was near the door that opened onto the stairway which led up into what we children

had always called the 'ghost attic.'

"It was now easy for me to make my way back to my room, which I did and crept back into bed feeling very foolish. I was glad indeed that nobody had seen me.

"Well, I studied a good deal over that incident, which, of course, I kept a closed secret, and finally decided that my walking in my sleep on this occasion must have been a result of reading a ghost story the day before, in which some young folks valiantly invaded a haunted house after night, only to find that the supposed ghosts were a colony of bats that infested the place. I couldn't recall dreaming about anything of the kind myself, but sleep walkers as a rule, I understand, don't remember their dreams.

"I was eighteen years old when this occurred, nothing further of the kind happened until fourteen months later, the middle of the following summer, when I walked clear out of the house in the middle of the night and down to the boys' swimming pool that was fed by the creek that ran through father's farm. I don't know what it was that caused me to make this trip unless it was the talk I had heard among the boys about the springboard they had set up on the bank for diving. I was not ill on this occasion nor on the last preceding.

"But, fortunately, I was watched, or I probably would not be here tonight, for I was unable to swim. A young man, who was earn-

ing his way through college by working on farms in the summer and anything he could get to do out of school hours, was employed by my father during this summer. He had been out late that night and was coming into the yard as I left the house. He followed me.

"I went direct to the swimming hole and walked out on the springboard. The young man who was following me rushed forward to stop me, but too late. I got to the end of the board when, crack!—the board broke——"

Mrs. Hutchins got no further. Her story was interrupted in a manner that took the minds of both narrator and listener off the subject.

The violence of the storm had subsided, so that, although there was still a heavy down-pour of rain, it was accompanied by little noise resulting from confusion of the elements. Almost simultaneously with the utterance of the word "crack" by Aunt Hannah, indicating the sound of the breaking of a swimming-pool springboard hundreds of miles distant and more than thirty years before, came the sound of a real "crack" that split the air sharply two hundred yards away. It sounded very much like the explosion of a firearm, and before a word of astonishment could escape the lips of the startled listeners, the sound was followed by another, another and another of like character in rapid succession. Then came a scream of a human voice indicative of mingled pain, anger, and terror.

CHAPTER XV.

HAZEL FIGURES IT OUT.

For fully a minute after the last sound of the gun battle a short distance from the camp of the Camp Fire Girls died away, Hazel Edwards and her aunt sat gazing at each other with fear-blanchéd countenances. Not that they were in great dread of the infliction of any personal harm upon them, for there was probably only a remote possibility of anything of that sort; but circumstances of this character usually compel in witnesses a vague kind of awe and strike an inharmonious gamut of chills that wither the human soul even where the likelihood of physical injury is remote.

The sounds of the disturbance had one very effective result in the tent occupied by Hazel and Mrs. Hutchins. It drove from their minds all thoughts of the conversation in which they were engaged. Aunt Hannah's story remained unfinished at the critical point where it was interrupted, and the only evidence furnished to her audience of one that she was not drowned immediately after the breaking of the springboard was the fact that she was there to tell the story.

"My! wasn't that terrible?" Hazel exclaimed at last, as if she had just been able to catch her breath.

"It's as mysterious as it was terrible," Aunt Hannah replied. "I can't imagine what could be the occasion of such an affair. That yell was simply blood curdling."

"I believe I can make a pretty good guess as to what it means," Hazel said, brightening up a little. "Probably a couple of tramps sought shelter from the storm in that old log building and got into a fight."

"There's just one objection I have to that theory," Mrs. Hutchins replied. "Tramps as a rule don't carry automatic pistols."

"How do you know those were automatics?" asked Hazel, not a little astonished at her aunt's shrewdness.

"Because of the rapidity with which they were discharged. I'm something of a firearm expert, Hazel, since my husband died and I've had so much property to protect, with only servants as companions."

They lapsed into quiet for a few moments and listened intently for further sounds indicating the results of the battle. But none came. The only sounds they heard were those produced by the falling rain and the conversation among the girls in the other tents, undoubtedly concerning the wild and mysterious disturbance in the vicinity of the abandoned rustic hotel.

"If it weren't for the danger of revealing our presence to the persons who took part in that duel, I'd call out to the other girls and ask

if everything were all right with them," Mrs. Hutchins remarked presently.

"Oh, auntie!" exclaimed Hazel, as an interesting idea came to her suddenly. "I believe I have the real explanation of that shooting affair. I bet anything it was a fight among some of those Fourth of July pickpockets who couldn't agree over the division of their loot."

"Why, Hazel!" returned her aunt eagerly. "I really believe you've struck the truth."

Hazel was delighted at the hearty acceptance of her theory. In her eagerness, she was impelled to supplement her surmise with something more that was equally interesting.

"And maybe," she said, "one of those men over there has in his possession that valuable letter that you lost. Don't you think we ought to get out of here as soon as this heavy rain slackens up a little, return to your house and telephone to the police? We ought to get some officers down here before daylight. Those men are probably staying in that old building during the night and will undoubtedly leave in the morning."

"That's a good idea," Mrs. Hutchins replied. "I tell you what we'll do meanwhile. We'll sleep in shifts until it stops raining. You lie down and sleep for an hour or two and I'll keep watch for a slackening of the storm. If it doesn't slow up by, say 10:30 o'clock, I'll call you and then lie down for a while myself."

"No, auntie," Hazel objected, "I'll take the first watch. I'm not the least bit sleepy. I

have some magazines here that I'd like to read anyway."

Aunt Hannah was really tired as a result of her exertions during the day, and it was not hard to induce her to yield to this modification of her plan. As she lay down on one of the cots, Hazel remarked:

"I wish I could talk with the girls in the other tents. They must have been alarmed at those terrible sounds. If we could all get together and reassure each other that we are all right, no doubt everybody in this camp would rest better until morning."

"We'll visit them all before we go back to the house to telephone to the police," Mrs. Hutchins replied.

"I have an idea for improving the efficiency and convenience of our camp," Hazel said as she turned the leaves of a periodical she had just picked up. "Do you know what made me think of it? It's a telephone advertisement in this magazine. Why shouldn't we install a telephone system in our camp? I don't believe it would cost much, and we could have lots of fun with it. Besides, what a convenience it would be right now. Why didn't we ever think of it before?"

"Necessity is the mother of invention, you know," Aunt Hannah reminded, with a smile.

"Yes, and sleep is a necessity of rest. Now, auntie, you go right to sleep and forget about telephones and everything else. I'll wake you when I get sleepy or when it stops raining."

CHAPTER XVI.

THREE MESSENGERS.

Hazel did not wake her aunt because of any sleepy desire to be relieved of her watch. About 10 o'clock she observed that the down-pour of rain was not nearly so heavy as it had been an hour or two earlier; so she decided not to awaken the sleeping woman as long as it seemed probable that the rainfall would stop in a short time.

Fifteen minutes later she was able to hear no patter of waterdrops on the fly of the tent, and she was about to go outside to inspect the condition of the weather when the flaps of the entrance were pushed apart and Harriet Newcomb and Violet Munday entered.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came," Hazel said softly. "Sh-h, don't wake Aunt Hannah. She's pretty tired and has had a lot to worry her. Sit down on this cot over here and I'll tell you what has happened, and then you can go and inform the other girls."

Hazel told her story in as few words as possible, closing with her suggestion that she and Aunt Hannah return to the latter's house and telephone for police assistance.

"But I'm wondering now if that is the best plan after all," she added. "Aunt Hannah is pretty well along in years you know, and I'm afraid the trip afoot wouldn't do her any

good. It's less than a mile, but it is so dark and the ground is so wet that I'm afraid she couldn't safely walk that distance under those circumstances, after the other exertion and trouble she has gone through. Now, if one of you girls would go with me, we'd make the trip in no time."

"I'll go," volunteered Harriet and Violet in almost the same breath; then Harriet added:

"We can both go with you. That'll be good company—three's a crowd, you know, and we'll need a crowd to chase the midnight gloom out of the wet woods."

"All right, girls, that will be fine," Hazel said gratefully. "Thank you ever so much. Now, will you go with me around to the other tents to inform the girls that everybody is all right? Don't say anything to them about our going to the house, because that will delay matters too much. You two have a tent together, haven't you? All right, you won't have to do much explaining to anybody. We'll each take a tent and soon have it all over with."

The three girls worked rapidly and in fifteen minutes they were back in the tent occupied by Hazel and Mrs. Hutchins. The latter was still asleep. Hazel woke her gently and informed her what she and Harriet and Violet proposed to do. Aunt Hannah did not protest, for she realized that this plan was the best. She thanked the girls heartily and then gave them instructions as to how to get into the

house and whom they should call up when they got in.

"I was thinking the matter over as I fell asleep and recalled our conversation, Hazel, about asking aid from the police," Mrs. Hutchins said. "We were wrong in one respect. The police have no authority outside the city limits. The county sheriff is the man you want to call. His name is Caleb Stevens. You'll find him in the telephone book as sheriff; or if by any chance you can't find the book, call the operator and she'll get the sheriff's home on the wire for you."

"You're not afraid to stay here in this tent alone, are you?" Hazel asked as they prepared to leave.

For answer, Mrs. Hutchins picked up a small valise in which she had brought a few personal effects to the camp, opened it and took out a small black, stocky, L-shaped automatic pistol and slipped it under the pillow of her bed, saying:

"Anybody who gets the best of me will have to get his hands on me before I can get my hands on this."

These words sent a rather grewsome chill through the girls, and Hazel hastened to change the subject.

"It's too bad," she said, "that there isn't an extra cot in one of the other tents. But we won't be gone long, auntie. We ought to be back in an hour, easily."

"Don't lose your way," Aunt Hannah warned.

"No danger of that," Hazel replied. "We've been over that route several times and we've got some good flashlights to light our path. We'll leave one for you, auntie. It may come handy, and you won't need to keep the candles burning. Here's one."

Hazel took an electric flashlight from under her pillow and gave it to her aunt, who had lain down again on her cot. Then she took another from a satchel in which she kept a supply of personal miscellany and announced that she was ready to start.

"Well, by-by, auntie," Hazel said, pausing a moment at the entrance before following the other two girls, who had stepped outside. "You'd better go to sleep again and get all the rest you can. There's no telling when we'll be back. We may have to wait for the sheriff unless we can give him all the information he wants over the telephone."

Hazel turned to go; then stopped with this addition to her good-by remarks:

"By the way, perhaps we had better announce ourselves and not appear before you too suddenly on our return. If you should be awake, you'll know we've got back when you hear us call out 'Wo-he-lo'."

In a few moments the three girls were making their way, Indian file, up the hill toward the trail that led across country to Aunt Hannah's house.

CHAPTER XVII.

CALLING HELP.

The trip to Mrs. Hutchins' home was quickly made. The difficulties on the way were of only minor character. The girls were well equipped for obstacles and inconveniences. To protect them against the water-laden trees, bushes, grass, and further rainfall, they wore rain-coats and rain-hats and waterproofed hiking shoes. Their electric flashlights also were very serviceable in aiding them to pick their way.

The trail they followed was a well-worn cow-path over the big hill and through the forest as far as the barnyard. Beyond this the three messengers followed the path through the orchard, which recalled to the minds of Hazel and Harriet another journey of equally thrilling character on the night before. But they said nothing about it, inasmuch as Aunt Hannah's somnambulism was a secret between them.

They proceeded at once to the front entrance, where Hazel pushed the electric button. In a few moments a voice, which they easily recognized as Minerva's, called through the door:

"Who's there?"

"It's Hazel and two of the other girls,

Minerva," the former answered. "Let us in; we want to telephone."

The colored housekeeper unlocked and opened the door with such haste as to startle the midnight callers, or, at least, to arouse no little curiosity in them. But the reason for Minerva's precipitate haste was soon explained.

"Land o' livin', chile!" the faithful negress exclaimed with deep emotion as she swung the door wide open; "you don' mean to tell me Mrs. Hutchins is sick an' you's goin' telephone for a doctor?"

"Oh, no, nothing of that sort," Hazel replied reassuringly. "We left her perfectly well in the camp. But there's been some bad men fighting with guns down at the old hotel and we want to call the sheriff for protection."

"My land o' goodness!" cried Minerva. "Are yo' sure they hain't killed all the rest o' you Camp Fire Girls by this time?"

"We hope not, Minerva," Hazel said with a smile that ought to have dispelled the fears of her inquisitor.

Without further ado, she went to the telephone desk and after a hurried search in the directory, rang the operator and gave her a number. Five minutes later Sheriff Stevens, roused out of a sound slumber, called gruffly into her ear:

"Hello!"

"Hello!" Hazel replied. "Is this the sheriff?"

"Yes," was the answer, more sharp and

short than gruff this time. "What do you want?"

"This is Mrs. Hutchins' niece, Miss Edwards," Hazel began to explain, when she was interrupted.

"Oh, Miss Edwards!" said the voice at the other end of the wire, although it sounded like that of another person. "Excuse my abruptness, but I guess I haven't waked up yet. What can I do for you?"

"We Camp Fire Girls are camping down in Fern Hollow," Hazel recited rapidly, for she had rehearsed her story to herself several times, in order that she might be able to make as speedy and effective an appeal to the sheriff as possible. "Aunt Hannah is with us. Three of us just came back through the wet timber to Mrs. Hutchins' house to call you up. There's been a fight with firearms between some men down at that old log hotel in the hollow. We could hear the shots in rapid succession and then there was an awful scream, and we didn't hear anything more. Can you come right away? Aunt Hannah thinks the men who had the fight must belong to that gang of thieves that raided Fairberry on the Fourth. One of them stole a very valuable paper from her handbag and she's very anxious to get it back."

"I'll get busy right away, Miss Edwards," the sheriff replied with businesslike energy, which indicated that he regarded the source

of this summons as an extremely important one. "Where is your camp?"

"Just a short distance south of the old hotel."

"Are you going back?"

"Yes, right away, unless there's something to keep us here. We want to go back and tell Aunt Hannah you're coming."

"Tell her I'll be there in an hour if possible, or as soon as I can get my men together. If there are men down there desperate enough to use guns, we'll have to come in good force and well prepared."

"All right. Good-by."

Hazel hung up the receiver and announced results to her companions. Minerva and another servant, who had arrived on the scene in time to hear the principal part of the statement to the sheriff, stood by with awed expressions on their faces.

"I think I'll call up Mr. McKenzie and tell him what has happened," Hazel said as the thought came to her. "What is his number, Minerva?"

"One-four-two," the latter replied, and a few moments later this number was being rung.

Mr. McKenzie did not require as much time to wake up as did Sheriff Stevens. In about two minutes he was answering the call quite cheerfully. After listening to Hazel's story, he said:

"I'll be with you in a jiffy. Just wait there

at the house and I'll call and go back with you."

Fifteen minutes later Mr. McKenzie with a magazine shotgun on his shoulder, rang the front doorbell and the three girls left the house and followed him along the path through the orchard, into the pitch-dark timber, over the big hill and down into the semi-wilderness of Fern hollow, which was ringing with the merciless laughter of a swollen, stone-stepped, boulder-blocked stream.

Fifteen or twenty paces from the nearest tent, Hazel softly sounded the agreed signal of approach:

"Wo-he-lo!"

And Aunt Hannah answered back like a real Camp Fire Girl:

"Wo-he-lo!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAMP FIRE GIRL SCOUTS.

"Well, here we are, Aunt Hannah," Hazel announced as she entered the tent. "We've brought help, and more is coming. Mr. McKenzie is here."

"Good," Mrs. Hutchins said. "That was very thoughtful of you. It never occurred to me to suggest that you call him up. I couldn't think of any one except the police. Did you have any trouble making the trip?"

"Not in the least. We found our way almost as easily as if it had been daylight."

"We knocked oceans of water off the bushes and small trees and we just waded in water where the grass was high, but I didn't even get my feet wet," said Violet with figurative extravagance. "Really, I think it was a delightful adventure, especially so if we prove we have started a campaign that will result in capturing some of those bad, bad men who stole our money and valuables."

Mr. McKenzie did not wait for the arrival of the sheriff before beginning an investigation of the strange gun battle in or near the abandoned summer-resort hotel. At his request, Hazel loaned him a flashlight and he started off at once, gun in hand, through the trees and bushes toward the place from which the sounds of battle seemed to have come.

Scarcely had he departed when Hazel proved her daring and adventurous spirit by suggesting to Harriet and Violet:

"Say, girls, let's follow Mr. McKenzie and see what he finds. We can keep at a safe distance and not get into trouble where we can be of no service. But there might be developments where we could lend him considerable assistance."

"I'm game," Violet announced. "These are not times for girls to be cowards when millions of men are rushing into the volcanoes of the European battlefields impelled by patriotic motives."

"Good for you, Violet!" Harriet exclaimed enthusiastically. "They won't dare call us the weaker sex much longer, will they, Mrs. Hutchins?"

"I should say they won't," the latter replied; "at least not if the girls all join the Camp Fire organization and it does for all of them what it has done for you."

"We might earn some honors out of this night's work," Violet suggested. "Let's go at it with that in view. What do you say, girls?"

"I vote aye," Hazel said.

"I, too," Harriet chimed in.

"Be careful of every move you make," Aunt Hannah warned. "Remember that caution, circumspection and judgment are just as much necessary qualifications of good Camp Fire Girls as bravery and daring."

"We'll be careful," Hazel promised as the three filed out of the tent.

The clouds in the wind-swept heavens were now fast breaking up, indicating that the last remaining forces of the storm were making a hurried retreat in disorder. From the time when the three Camp Fire messengers left their camp to summon aid and protection against the night-hidden men of violence and mystery until their return, there were fitful, but unsuccessful, efforts on the part of the elements to resume the bombardment of this local section of Mother Earth. Now and then, the rain poured down for periods of a minute or two, as if reenforced with an abundant supply of fresh gush and bravado, but the gush soon gave out and the bravado collapsed into a confession of exhaustion.

The storm was really over and the moon, placid in her far-distant removal from this anarchistic thrashing of elements, hovered calmly over the scene waiting for an opportunity to smile her inconsequential commiseration through the rifts in the clouds. No sooner did she begin this confusing performance than the panic among the broken and exhausted forces of the storm-army became general and the sky was rapidly cleared of the frowning hordes of the enemies of peacefulness.

Mr. McKenzie was out of sight of the camp when the trio of Camp Fire Girl scouts left Mrs. Hutchins' tent to reconnoiter. A nondescript miscellany of trees, bushes, shrubbery and ferns separated this starting place from the abandoned semi-wilderness hotel. Al-

though the moon had difficulty in making her luminous disk clearly visible through the scurrying clouds, still the heavens and all open places upon the earth were comparatively light. This condition was gratefully observed by the young feminine scouts, for they regarded it as unwise to use their search-lights to aid them in finding their way during this reconnoitering excursion.

But in spite of the partial clearing of the atmosphere, they found it hard work to pick a passage through the confusion of vegetation. Hence their movements were slow, and it was fully ten minutes before the dark mass of the abandoned hotel loomed before their eyes.

Still they beheld nothing of special interest other than the awe and the gloom of the scene. There was no sign of life near the building, so far as they were able to see or hear. The storm had driven the night birds and insects into shelter, and few of them had ventured out again following the calming of the elements.

"Let's go around the building at a safe distance and see what we can discover," Hazel proposed.

The other girls voiced a whispered assent, and they began their encircling advance to the right. About half-way around and directly in front of the entrance of the log structure they stopped, as all of them simultaneously observed the form of a human being

apparently bending over something on the ground.

Eagerly, almost fearfully, they leaned forward as if such inclining of their bodies would enable them to obtain a clearer view of the object of their attention.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RESCUE.

Suddenly there was a flash of light, like the striking of a match close to the overleaning human form, but it did not burn out.

"That's Mr. McKenzie," Hazel declared. "See, that's the flashlight we gave him, and he's found something."

"Yes, and here's an automobile," Violet announced, pointing "around" the edge of a large bush near which they were standing. The others looked in the direction indicated and beheld the forward end of a machine protruding about a foot beyond the foliage of the bush.

Suddenly Hazel laid a hand on each of her companions and pressed them back, explaining in a soft whisper:

"Keep under cover. It may belong to the pickpocket bandits. Wait here a minute and I'll find out."

She turned and moved around the bush the other way. A minute later she returned, with this announcement:

"There's nobody in it, and I don't see anybody around. I don't believe it belongs to the bandits."

"Why not?" Violet inquired.

"Because it would be foolish for them to stay so near the scene of their raid with a

strange automobile. There must be some other explanation to this affair."

"What shall we do now?" Harriet asked.

"I'm going to signal to Mr. McKenzie," Hazel replied. "I'm going to test his quickness of wit at the same time and see if he will recognize our call when it's given out in the woods where it might be mistaken for the call of some denizen of the wilds. He knows what it is, for he's heard us give it and told me one day that it sounded like a combination of the hoot of an owl and the song of a whip-poor-will."

"Did he say that?" Violet asked with a whispered suggestion of a laugh. "He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"Oh, he was just joking, of course," Hazel continued. "Now, I'm going to give the call just as near what he says it sounds like as I can. Stand as close to this bush as you can, so he can't see us. Now, here goes:

"Wo-he-lo!"

Hazel gave the call with a sort of plaintive hollowness that spoke well for her effort. No uninformed person would have suspected it to have been the utterance of a human voice.

Eagerly the girls watch for results. They seemed slow coming. For a few seconds there was not a sign of life in the dimly outlined stooping figure. Presently, however, it stood erect and seemed to turn around. Then came the answer in such a falsetto effort to imitate

Hazel's call that each of the girls restrained a laugh only with difficulty.

"There's no warning in that call," Hazel said confidently. "Come on, let's go and see what he's found."

She turned on her flashlight to enable her to better pick her way, and the other girls did likewise. In a few moments they reached the spot where Mr. McKenzie stood.

There was no need of asking what of interest he had discovered. The girls were shocked with the view of a man lying apparently unconscious on the ground.

"Is he dead?" Violet gasped in trembling tones.

"No, but he hasn't much life left," Mr. McKenzie replied. "I mean that he's weak from loss of blood and exposure."

"Why, that's Mr. Anderson, the lawyer who came to see Aunt Hannah," Hazel exclaimed as Mr. McKenzie threw the rays of his flashlight on the injured man's face.

"And that must be his automobile over there," Harriet added.

"Where is the auto?" the former inquired.

Over by the bush where we were standing when I gave you the Wo-he-lo call," Hazel answered.

"Then, I'd better put him into his machine and hurry him away to a doctor," said Mr. McKenzie.

"We ought to do something for him here first," Hazel suggested.

"What can you do?"

"He ought not to have those wet clothes on any longer than absolutely necessary. We can go up to the camp for some blankets to wrap him in."

"That isn't a bad idea," Mr. McKenzie said. "I wonder if two of you girls couldn't take hold of his feet and help me carry him over to the automobile—I'll take him by the shoulders. Then you could go and get the blankets while I got the machine ready to start."

Hazel and Harriet took hold of the man's feet as suggested and Violet lighted the way with her flashlight. It was no easy task, for the wounded man must have weighed at least 170 pounds, but at last they reached the automobile and with the united effort of all four, aided by the patient, who revived considerably and put forth a fair degree of self-helping energy, they succeeded in getting him into the machine. Then they returned to the camp and got two blankets, delaying long enough to inform Mrs. Hutchins of the discovery. The latter was astonished when she learned the identity of the victim.

"I thought he drove back toward town when he left us," she said. "But I suppose he thought the storm was too near and decided to seek shelter in that old building. By the way, you'd better take a flask of cordial back with you to brace him up during the drive."

The girls went to the kitchen tent and took a flask from the medicine kit and then has-

tened back to the patient. Mr. McKenzie soon had the injured man bundled in a reclining position on the rear seat, and then attempted to reinvigorate him with a dose of the cordial. Thus far he had scarcely uttered a word, but now all were delighted when he spoke thus in a fairly strong voice:

"Won't a couple of you girls come along and sit back here in the automobile with me? I'm afraid something might happen; the jolting of the machine might cause me to faint and fall off the seat. Perhaps this good man will bring you back in the machine. You're perfectly welcome to the use of it."

"Why, yes, I'll go," Hazel volunteered. "What do you say, Harriet—Violet?"

"I'll go," said Harriet.

"And I'll go back and stay with your aunt until you return, Hazel," said Violet.

This arrangement being favored by all, Hazel and Harriet climbed into the automobile, while Violet turned back toward the camp. The latter gave an agreed signal when she arrived at the tent occupied by Aunt Hannah, and then the auto, with its two powerful headlights blazing far in advance, started along the road through the timber toward the main highway.

As the injured passenger appeared to have recovered considerable strength and seemed to desire to talk, Hazel encouraged him to tell his story in a few words. The two girls were

seated on drop-seats in front, facing the patient.

"I suppose you know who I am?" the lawyer began, and as Hazel nodded, he continued: "Well, after I left your camp, the clouds were looking so black and threatening and the wind was carrying them along so rapidly that I thought I had not better risk being caught in the storm. So I turned over by that old building, got the machine ready to withstand a driving rain and got under the roof just as the storm broke.

"I don't know how long I waited, but it must have been several hours and I was getting mighty tired and hungry. At last the storm began to abate and I was beginning to hope that I would soon be able to leave the place when something very unexpected happened. I heard a noise overhead, which plainly meant that some animal larger than a kitten was moving about. I listened intently and presently made up my mind that the sounds could be none other than those of human footsteps. They reached the head of the stairway and then proceeded carefully, cautiously, down the steps. I moved back into a dark corner and strained my eyes for as clear a view as possible.

"Well, the fellow,—it was a man—after reaching the first floor, went direct to the fireplace and began to build a fire with wood from a pile of dead timber that somebody had put there. I imagine he must have been asleep

upstairs up to the time when the first sounds of his footsteps reached my ears. The fire soon lighted up the room a considerable distance from the fireplace, so that I was certain I would be discovered if the man should turn his eyes toward me.

"I was not particularly afraid of an encounter with him, for he was a very small man and, moreover, I could see no reason why two such persons as we, who had sought shelter in this out-of-the-way place, should have any occasion for trouble between us. Still, his actions were so peculiar that my bump of curiosity forced me to decide to watch him and see what he was up to. There seemed to be no good reason for building the fire, for, while it produced a cheerful light in that gloomy place, it soon made the room uncomfortably warm.

"But I was not long in finding out what he was up to. He cleared away a place on the hearth and then began to produce from various pockets such an assortment of pocket-books, jewelry, and loose change as to leave no doubt in my mind concerning the nature of his profession. Evidently he had made a haul somewhere. Then I recalled the circumstances of the raid of pickpocket bandits in Fairberry on the Fourth and decided at once that he must have been a member of that gang.

"After he had made a thorough examination of his stolen treasure, he transferred the paper money into a billbook, the loose change into one of his pockets, and threw the purses,

from which he had taken this money, into the fire. Then he took from a pocket of his coat what appeared to be a letter, drew from the envelope a bit of folded paper, unfolded it, held it close to the fire and began to study its contents."

At this point in the narrative Hazel could scarcely restrain an expression of excitement. She was certain as to the identity of that letter.

"He studied and studied over it," the narrator continued, "but seemed to be unable to get anything satisfactory out of it. Meanwhile I grew very tired standing in an uncomfortable position and shifted my feet to relieve myself. In doing so I made a slight noise that caused the fellow to spring up in alarm.

"I don't know what caused me to make the move that I next made unless it was the consciousness that he was a criminal and must be desperately alarmed at my discovery of so much stolen goods in his possession. I did not have much time to think. It seemed that I must get him first, or he might get me; so I made a dive for him, figuring on knocking him out before he could draw a gun.

"But he was quick as a cat. He dodged the pass I made at him and I nearly fell over. The next thing I knew he was plugging away at me with an automatic. He fired two shots at me inside the building, but missed both times. I ran out through the doorway and into the rain, which was still coming down pretty

heavy. But he rushed out after me and continued to pump his murderous machine gun at me. I think he fired about four or five shots in the open. One of them struck me in the hip, I believe, and the pain it sent through my frame was just plain agony. I recall uttering a scream with all my lungs, not so much because of the pain as with a hope of sounding an alarm that might result in his capture. When I felt my head must have struck a stone or something hard that knocked me out."

"We heard the shots and the scream, and they were the cause of our coming to your assistance," Hazel explained.

"I want to thank you very much for what you have done for me," the injured man returned. "If there is any way in which I can return the favor I am sure you won't make a mistake by letting me know."

"There is a way you can do me a great favor," Hazel said quickly, but calmly.

"Tell me how and it is as good as done," the lawyer promised, rashly, perhaps.

"Stop persecuting my Aunt Hannah Hutchins."

The wounded man was silent for more than a minute.

CHAPTER XX.

SLEEPING TOO LATE.

"What makes you think I have been persecuting your aunt?" Attorney Anderson at last inquired.

"Because she says you have," Hazel replied unhesitatingly. "She says you represent some of her late husband's relatives who have no use for her and just delight in making trouble for her."

The injured man was silent again for a few moments. He seemed to be suffering considerably, as a result perhaps of the jolting of the machine over a rough and slippery roadway, and of mental exertion in the telling of his story.

"You'd better not talk any more now," Hazel said, feeling that quite as good results would be attained by dropping the subject, now that she had impressed upon her aunt's persecutor the full force of her request. "Would you like a little more of this cordial? We'll be at the hospital pretty soon now."

"Yes, I believe I will take another taste," the man replied, reaching for the flask. "But let me reassure you on this point: I'll look into your aunt's affairs from her point of view, as well as from the point of view of my client, hereafter, and if I find I have done her

an injustice, it will stop so far as I am concerned, at least."

"She could ask nothing more than that from you," Hazel said with a little sigh of relief.

The patient was taken to the only hospital in the city and left in charge of a nurse. Then Mr. McKenzie drove the machine back to camp and left the two girl passengers there, after which he took the automobile back to the garage where it belonged.

It was almost daylight when Hazel and Harriet entered the tent that had been occupied by Harriet and Violet before the beginning of events that had made the night so wakeful a period for them. They were tired and sleepy and their first thought was to get into bed as soon as possible. Their last topic of conversation before they closed their eyes in slumber was discussed thus:

"I wonder if the sheriff got here and if he has succeeded in getting a line on anything?" Harriet said.

"Yes I wonder, too," was Hazel's answering comment. "But we'll find out in the morning. I want to see him and tell him what Mr. Anderson saw in that old building before the shooting began."

"Yes, it might help him to find the whole gang of pickpockets," Harriet suggested. "We ought not to sleep very late, for if he wants any further information he probably will be here at the camp soon after daybreak."

"We probably won't be able to sleep very

late with all the noise that comes with the waking up of camp every morning," Hazel reassured.

But they did sleep late, and Aunt Hannah was responsible for this fact. She awoke early and warned the other girls not to wake them, as they had been up most of the night. Then followed a long period of explaining, which served chiefly to excite the listeners and delay breakfast.

In the meanwhile Mr. McKenzie arrived in Mrs. Hutchins' automobile to inquire if all had gone as well as could be expected and if he could be of any further service. In the course of the conversation, Mrs. Hutchins was reminded of certain matters pertaining to the running of the farm which required her attention, and she decided to return with her farm manager at once. Minerva had sent word that she would delay breakfast until 8:30 o'clock, if "the Missus" wished to come back by that time.

Hazel and Harriet awoke at about 9 o'clock and the former expressed surprise and disappointment at the departure of her aunt, for whom she felt she had some very important information. But presently the sheriff appeared at the camp to report that he and three other men had been scouring the vicinity for several hours without success. He desired to ask some more questions, he said.

His "more questions" soon brought out the sequel to Hazel's story that she had given to

him the night before. Immediately the sheriff started back to town to interview Attorney Anderson at the hospital.

During the forenoon all the girls followed a program which they had mapped out for a period of several days under rules of the Camp Fire organization. All were working for honors of various sorts. Most of them did bead work for their ceremonial gowns, basket work, sewing, tatting, embroidering, crocheting, and other such hand craft, while resting in camp. While moving about in the timber and over the hillsides and along the banks of the stream they sought to exercise their skill in nature lore for the purpose of acquiring Blue Honors. Indeed, they had attained no small degree of skill along such lines, and could name more kinds of trees, grass, flowers, birds, small animals and insects, and even snakes, than many a rash reckoner would ever guess.

Early in the afternoon Hazel became much concerned because she had not yet recited to her aunt the significant details of the story told to her and Harriet by Attorney Anderson of what he saw in the old log hotel the night before. At about 2:30 o'clock she decided that she could not rest until she had seen Mrs. Hutchins and given her this important information, and so she and Harriet walked to Mrs. Hutchins' house to tell their story.

But Aunt Hannah was not there. She had gone down town, Minerva said, and "there

was no tellin' when she would be back." They waited until 4:30 o'clock and then decided to return to camp, as there were important arrangements to be made for the Council Fire that night.

Before leaving the house, Hazel requested Minerva to impress upon Aunt Hannah's mind the fact that she had some important information for her, and that she must see her that night or early next morning without fail.

"Tell her that if she does not come to the camp tonight I will be here for breakfast in the morning," were Hazel's departing words.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MIDNIGHT COUNCIL FIRE.

It was 11:30 o'clock at night. The moon was shining brightly from a clear sky. There was a freshness of life in vegetant nature that manifested itself in a degree to every one of the five senses. The heavy rain of the night before and the warm sunshine that followed had got in their good work with evident results everywhere in and about Fern hollow.

At precisely 11:30 o'clock, according to the main timepiece of the Flamingo Camp Fire Girls' camp, the alarm of said timepiece rang out with far-sounding clearness. The ring was not muffled by the canvass inclosure within which the alarm-clock stood, for it was a warm night and all the tents had been opened to admit all the fresh air that would pass through.

With the ringing of the alarm, the two occupants of the tent arose from the cots where they had been reclining and quickly prepared themselves for a tour of the other tents to carry the alarm from the clock to every ear. Five minutes later every sleeping tent in the camp was a scene of the liveliest activity.

Who says a girl can't dress quickly when occasion demands? The occasion in this instance was a dressing race. As soon as all had been awakened, the signal was given and

then began the novel speed test. Pretty soon the voice of Marie Crismore called out:

"Ready—I win!"

"Two minutes and fifty-eight seconds," announced Miss Ladd, the timekeeper, who herself made a very good dressing record, although hampered with the necessity of timing of the members of the Fire in her charge.

The race was a close one, the difference in the time made by the winner and the last girl dressed being measured only by seconds. The picture that now presented itself in the soft moonlight was that of thirteen Camp Fire Girls and their Guardian clad in ceremonial gowns and with tan sheepskin moccasins on their feet and their hair bound with headbands and strings of honor beads hanging round their necks.

Of course, all the girls had reckoned on this race before going to bed and had plaited their hair in two braids each and were very careful when they lay down not to tangle the loose locks any further than was unavoidable; and so, when they got up just a dash of their combs over the few tangled places sufficed to make them presentable so far as this portion of their toilet was concerned.

The Guardian now led the way, up hill a short distance, then directly north two hundred yards, taking a zig-zag course in order to avoid impediments of bush and underbrush, and then down hill again to a clear and fairly

level grassy spot a few rods distant from the abandoned summer-resort headquarters. Here all was in readiness for the first midnight Council Fire any of those present had ever known to be held.

Strictly speaking, it was contrary to the spirit of the hygienic rules of the organization, which are not friendly to the "keeping of late hours." Miss Ladd objected when the first suggestion of a midnight Council Fire was made. It was a bad precedent to establish, she said. "Young girls should hold fast to the principle of 'early to bed and early to rise'," she argued, but was interrupted by Marie Crismore, who inquired:

"Isn't getting up at midnight early rising?"

"Yes, but you must go to bed a 4 p. m.," the Guardian answered quickly.

"We'll do that, if you say so," said Ernestine Johanson. "But if we go to bed at 8:30 o'clock, take a recess from sleep between 11:30 and 1:30, and then go back to bed and sleep until 6:30 we will have had eight hours' sleep."

"Why have you girls set your hearts on this custom-breaking idea?" Miss Ladd inquired.

"The real reason is this," volunteered Violet Munday. "Snoqualm is going to be made a Torch Bearer, you know, and Snoqualm is the Indian for moon. Now, when is the best time for her to receive her highest honors as a Camp Fire Girl if it is not when the reign of the moon in the heavens is subject to the least dispute—midnight? Can we honor Snoqualm

any more than by making her a Torch Bearer when the sun is directly under her feet?"

Snoqualm was Hazel Edwards' Camp Fire name. She was not present when this discussion was held, or Violet's speech would have been postponed. The Guardian was won over completely by the argument. It was to be a surprise on Hazel.

Flamingo Fire, in spite of this departure, was careful in its observance of the rules of the craft. The general instruction that ceremonial meetings should be held weekly at summer camps was obeyed implicitly, and this midnight Council Fire was the first of four scheduled for the month of July. The programs of these meetings promised to be interesting during the entire vacation outing, as the girls were all working industriously for honors and promotion.

After their arrival at the scene of this midnight Council Fire and the formation of the circle, wood and kindling were brought to the center of the circle by the Wood Gatherers. To Marion Starlock, a Torch Bearer, was assigned the duty of lighting the fire. This she did with the stick-rubbing process, at which she was especially skilled. After the blaze of the burning tinder of shredded cottonwood roots had ignited the kindling and then seized onto the wood that was laid on top, the group of gowned midnight celebrants solmenly recited the following ode:

"O Fire!

Long years ago when our fathers fought with great animals, you were their protection. From the cruel cold of winter you saved them. When they needed food you changed the flesh of beasts into savory meat for them.

During all the ages your mysterious flame has been a symbol to them for Spirit.

So, tonight we light our fire in remembrance of the Great Spirit who gave you to us."

Then followed the chanting of "Wohelo Cheer," the roll call of the Camp Fire (most of them Indian) names, to which each person responded with the word "Kolah," the reading of the Count, the making of individual reports, the awarding of honors and finally initiations.

There was only one initiation before the Council Fire, that of Hazel Edwards, Snoqualm, the Moon, as Torch Bearer. At the request of the Guardian she arose, and the ceremony began.

The Guardian recited the history of her achievements, showing that Snoqualm had the required qualifications of a leader, was trustworthy and unselfish, and that she was able to present fifteen honors in addition to those she presented for the rank of Fire Maker. In conclusion, the head of the Fire said:

"Now, Snoqualm, I call upon you to repeat the Torch Bearer's desire."

And Snoqualm obeyed thus:

"That light which has been given to me. I desire to pass undimmed to others."

"Oh, girls, look there!"

These words, uttered at this juncture in tone and accents of a kind that are not usually associated with the quiet and composure of a Council Fire, sent a sharp thrill of apprehension through the group of girls and marked the close of the meeting. It was Julietta Hyde who spoke, and with her utterance she pointed one finger off toward the southwest.

Every eye turned in the direction indicated and beheld a sight that none of them will ever forget. Just emerging into the open from beyond a clump of bushes and small trees was the form of a woman of a little more than medium height, clad in a loose fitting garment, head bare, and advancing toward the abandoned summer-resort hotel.

CHAPTER XXII

AUNT HANNAH WAKES UP.

"Quick girls, no time for any more ceremony," Hazel exclaimed excitedly. "That woman is Aunt Hannah, and she's walking in her sleep. This is the second time she's done this just recently. Harriet and I saw her leave the house night before last and tried to follow her. Something is weighing heavily on her mind, and I must follow her and find out what it is. Come on, Harriet; we'll lead the way. You other girls hold back at a distance and be careful not to wake her. It probably would have a disastrous effect on her nerves."

The next instant, after the close of this speech, Hazel and Harriet were darting off through the bushes at considerable danger of stubbing their feet or scratching their faces and hands in their haste not to let the sleep-walker get away from them. Miss Ladd and the other members of the fire followed more circumspectly and with due regard for Hazel's expressed wish.

But the two girls ahead found it unavoidable to lose sight of Aunt Hannah for a minute or two. It appeared probable that her place of destination was the abandoned hotel, and if so, she undoubtedly would pass around the south side to get to the main entrance at the

east. The two girls realized that it would be impossible for them to follow her along the same course she was taking without there being a short period in the pursuit when the building would be between them and the woman they wished to keep in view. So they accepted the inevitable and made a short cut to the northeast and soon were in position to observe the sleep-walker as she came around the southeast corner of the building.

The latter appeared almost as soon as Hazel and Harriet reached their point of vantage, which was in the shadow of the big cottonwood tree near the building. She made direct for the entrance, looking straight ahead meanwhile, and appearing to be interested in nothing to the right or to the left, nor anything else, indeed, except the on-leading motive of her dream.

"We must follow her inside," said Hazel resolutely. "Are you game, Harriet?"

"I am if you are," the other replied, certainly not with bravado, but with a kind of subdued resoluteness.

"If we are careful, I don't think she will notice us," Hazel said confidently as she led the way.

Into the dark miniature lobby they went and were near enough to the somnambulist to see her pass into the room undoubtedly intended as the guests' lounging place, and containing the fireplace before which the Camp Fire had held one of its meetings. Into this

room the two girls followed the woman, and there they found it necessary to get within a few feet of her, in order to determine what she was doing. Four large paneless windows were in the north and south walls; but the illuminating power of the moon's rays was almost entirely shut off by a wide sheltered porch which ran around both of these sides of the building.

Hazel and Harriet managed to watch the actions of Mrs. Hutchins at safe proximity by keeping close to the north wall. They felt that they were in little danger of being discovered in this position, as there was only slight possibility of coming into physical contact with the somnambulist, and she seemed to be using her eyes for nothing whatever except to guide her movements straight ahead.

Without the least hesitation, Aunt Hannah went to the fireplace, took hold of one of the boulders of which the enclosure of the hearth was constructed, and began to work it from side to side. It required all her strength to do this, but presently she succeeded in lifting the stone out of its place and putting it down on the floor. Then she put her hand into the opening thus made and took out something which the watchers could see so indistinctly that they were unable to form any idea as to what it was. With this in her hands, she walked over to one of the windows, stood there a few moments, then returned, replaced the object in the hole, and put the boulder

back where she had found it. This done, she faced about and walked out of the building.

"Quick!" Hazel whispered to her companion. "Follow Aunt Hannah. I want to see that she gets home safely. I'll be with you in a minute. I must see what she was interested in here."

Harriet did as requested, while Hazel pushed the switch of her flashlight and threw the rays upon the spot of greatest interest over the fireplace.

The loose boulder was rather large and heavy, and the girl had some difficulty in removing it, but finally she succeeded in depositing it on the floor. Then she reached her hand into the hole as Aunt Hannah had done and drew out a metal box, about eighteen inches long and five inches square in the cross-section.

"I bet \$100,000 I know what this box contains," she mused as she turned to follow Harriet and Aunt Hannah.

But she had advanced only a few steps when she was seized from behind by a pair of strong hands and thrown violently to the floor. To catch herself she dropped the box. This was quickly seized by her assailant, who then made a dash for the entrance.

But he did not get far. At the door he was seized by other powerful hands, which threw him down upon the porch floor almost as violently as the latter had thrown Hazel.

"Come on, Miss Edwards!" cried a voice

that the panic-stricken but uninjured Hazel recognized as that of Mr. McKenzie. "I've got him!"

The girl ran out and snatched up the precious box, which had been dropped again in the scuffle. The former was searching his victim for a weapon. Hazel aided him with the rays of her flashlight. As she observed the features of the man and his small physique a grave suspicion took possession of her.

"Are you Percy Teich?" she asked, addressing the prisoner, who was no longer struggling.

Before he could answer, if he was so disposed, Harriet and Violet appeared on the porch.

"Where is Aunt Hannah?" Hazel inquired.

"She's outside with the girls," was Harriet's surprising answer. "She woke up. It didn't bother her at all. She's all right."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AUNT HANNAH REMEMBERS.

Aunt Hannah was not shocked at all when she awoke a short distance from the log building and found herself in a boudoir of a kind and character that few women of the world, save Mother Eve, have ever been known to occupy. Perhaps the mild manner in which she accepted the novel situation was due to the fact that her awakening was not occasioned by any sudden or violent experience in the course of her sleeping activities.

Then she saw Hazel and Violet coming toward her, and a few moments later beheld all the other members of Flamingo Camp Fire approaching in the moonlight. She was not slow in recognizing where she was.

"Have I been walking in my sleep, girls?" she inquired of the two who first came within speaking distance. "Tell me what has happened. What have I done?"

Mrs. Hutchins appeared to be almost amused at the situation.

"This is the second time you have walked in your sleep in the last three nights," Harriet said. "You appear to be interested in something in that building. You went in there tonight, removed a stone from the fireplace and examined something that seemed to be hidden there."

For the first time the awakened sleep-walker was excited.

"What's that you say?" she exclaimed. "Were you there? Did you see me? Come on and show me what I did!"

She led the way and Harriet and Violet followed. They had not gone far when evidences of a struggle on the porch reached their ears and eyes. This did not stop Mrs. Hutchins, however, and the girls continued to follow her.

They found Mr. McKenzie holding his prisoner down and examining his pockets for a weapon, while Hazel aided him with her flashlight.

"What does this mean?" Mrs. Hutchins inquired. "Why, that man is Percy Teich, one of the pickpocket bandits. What were you doing here?" she asked, addressing her husband's nephew.

"I know," Hazel answered for Teich, who seemed undisposed to talk on any subject. "He was here after those hidden securities of which you are trustee. He had Uncle Edmund's letter in his possession and had deciphered enough of it at least to inform him that the paper were in this building. It was he who shot Mr. Anderson night before last while here looking for the papers."

"Why, Hazel!" Aunt Hannah exclaimed excitedly. "Do you realize what you are telling me? I remember everything now—where my husband told me that he had hidden the papers. I can put my hand right on the spot.

Come on! I must get them at once. I can't wait an instant!"

"It's unnecessary, Auntie," Hazel returned. "I have them here in my hand. You did it in your sleep, and I got them after you went away. Then this man attacked me and took the box away."

"How did you happen to be here, John?" Aunt Hannah inquired, addressing her farm manager.

"Some of the cattle broke into the orchard, and while I was driving them out you came along, walking in your sleep, and I followed you," Mr. McKenzie replied.

"Let me prove to you that I remember now the secret that my husband gave to me on his deathbed and which I forgot," Mrs. Hutchins proposed. "Let me have your light, Hazel."

She led the way into the hotel parlor, or rest room, and went direct to the fireplace.

After a short examination of the stonework, she laid her hands on the loose boulder which she had removed a short time before and lifted it out of its place. The entire Camp Fire was present by this time, and a period of explanations followed.

Then all returned to their tents, while Mr. McKenzie kept watch over his prisoner. Mrs. Hutchins, of course, took the long treasure box with her and insisted on examining its contents before she retired again.

The examination proved satisfactory, so far

as she was able to determine. The metal case contained a dozen or more mortgage bonds of large denomination and a number of other important papers. After assuring herself that she had indeed discovered the long missing fortune of which she was the bonded trustee, she placed every paper carefully back into the box and closed it and then got back into bed, taking the treasure with her and holding it close to her under the covers.

Hazel fell asleep soon after she lay down, in spite of the wakeful happenings of the night. She was tired and sleepy, as it was quite natural for her to be under the circumstances, and moreover she had strong nerves and was capable of speedy recovery from shocking and thrilling experiences.

When she awoke, it could not have been more suddenly. Her first consciousness was the realization that she was sitting up in bed, with the sound of a sharp explosion ringing in her ears. She was more than frightened, for the explosion seemed to have taken place right in the inclosure where she slept. Her first thought was that someone must have thrown a bomb into the tent. A moment later she decided this idea was foolish, but she was unable to think of a reasonable substitute.

It was dark in the tent. Evidently the moon had gone down, for only the faintest rays of starlight came in through the openings in front and around the sides for the circulation of air. While Hazel was thus attempting to

drive away the panic that had seized her and to get a view of her obscured surroundings, there came several more explosions in rapid succession outside the tent. At once she realized the nature of these noises and in a moment was out of bed and beside her aunt's cot. With her hands she examined it. The covers had been tossed in a heap at the foot. The cot was empty.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AUNT HANNAH SHOOT

A great dread of some direful event held Hazel in a rigid position beside her aunt's cot for some moments, or minutes—she is unable to tell which. She was afraid to move, and yet duty told her that she ought not to be idle in this crisis, that if she were active and resourceful, she might be of important service to Aunt Hannah.

But what could she do? With an effort she answered this question by proving that she could do something. She moved, and this mere moving was a great relief. She reached under her pillow for the searchlight which she always kept there at night, and was still further relieved. What could she do now? was her next question. She could look out of the tent and see, perhaps, what was going on. With a resolution to this effect in her mind, she secured the flashlight and went to the front of the tent and looked out. She saw nothing of interest and was about to venture cautiously a little farther, when Aunt Hannah appeared suddenly before her, approaching around the northeast corner of the tent.

"Oh, Hazel!" she exclaimed in great distress; "I've been robbed again. Two men crept up to the side of the tent and one of them reached in and took the box out of the

cot beside me. I awoke just as they were getting away with it and grabbed my pistol and fired at them. Then I rolled out of bed and ran after them a distance of twenty or thirty feet. I could see their forms distinctly enough, I thought, and stopped and emptied all the rest of my cartridges at them. I think I hit one of the scoundrels, for he uttered an unmistakable curse of pain. Isn't this the worst piece of luck you ever heard of?"

Hazel recalled the lecture her aunt had given her very recently on the subject of luck and would have smiled and mildly rebuked the lecturer if the present situation had not been so serious.

"Who were they—have you any idea?" she inquired excitedly.

"One of them was Percy Teich, I feel certain," Mrs. Hutchins replied. "At any rate, one of them was a small man about Percy's size."

"But how did he get away? Do you suppose he played a trick on Mr. McKenzie and turned the tables on him?"

"I can't figure it out," Aunt Hannah said dubiously. "It sure is a puzzle to me. Something serious must have happened. We really ought to go and find out. John may be seriously wounded and suffering. If Percy Teich escaped, John must have got hurt. He wouldn't have let him go without a fight if he was in a position where he could fight."

As she finished speaking Harriet Newcomb and Violet Munday entered the tent to learn what had taken place. They were quickly informed, and then the four proceeded to the tents of the other girls to acquaint them with developments. All of them got up and dressed hurriedly when informed that a relief excursion was about to be made to the abandoned hotel where Mr. McKenzie had been left in charge of the prisoner.

In a few minutes all were ready and the start was made. Realizing that one or more of the desperadoes might be in or near the building, they proceeded cautiously and without light. As they neared the front entrance, they heard a loud groan which sent such a chill through the girls that every one of them halted in awed apprehension of a vision of something dreadful. Aunt Hannah proved herself the most courageous of all in this crisis.

"Don't be afraid, girls," she said. "That noise no doubt was made by Mr. McKenzie. He's probably injured, and we've got to steel ourselves to go to his rescue at once."

"I'm not afraid to go," said Katherine Crane, stepping ahead courageously.

"Nor I," said Violet Munday, whereupon this expression of bravery became a sort of slogan, and everybody repeated it.

"I think it is safe enough to switch on our lights," Mrs. Hutchins said, as a general movement forward was made.

Accordingly fifteen tiny electric bulbs became brilliant, and fifteen miniature floods of light were poured upon the porch as the party of rescuers ascended the steps. They were not long in finding the object of their search. He lay, bound and gagged, right in front of the entrance of the building.

Apparently he was not seriously injured, if at all, for his eyes gazed up at them strongly and clearly. Mrs. Hutchins at once began a search through his pockets and soon produced a large jackknife, which she opened with her teeth, her thumbnails not being strong enough. Then she cut his bonds and removed the gag from his mouth. The farmer sat up, moved his stiffened limbs with difficulty a few moments, then managed to get onto his feet with the assistance of some of the girls.

"What happened, John?" Aunt Hannah inquired. "How in the world did you ever get into such a predicament?"

"Not through any of my own choosing, you can be dead certain," he said with a kind of vindictive bitterness. "But I met more than my match that time. I never was licked before in my life, but I sure was licked that time. He handled me just like a muscular washer-woman would handle her four-year-old brat."

"Who did, John? Tell me quick. We haven't any time to loose."

"Why, that big fellow, of course," John replied fiercely. "The big fellow that crossed

the big sensation with the little fellow on the square on the Fourth. That was the biggest fake you ever heard of, as I've got good evidence to prove. They fooled me like hundreds of others to a frazzle. I thought it was on the square and would have bet money on it."

"Do you mean to say that that big fellow was here with Percy Teich tonight?" Mrs. Hutchins gasped.

"That's what I do mean to say," McKenzie replied with energy. "He was here all right. I guess I ought to know, for I felt his bone and muscle. He gripped me like steel. The moon hadn't gone down yet, and I could see his face plain enough. I got a good view of it, you see, on the Fourth. He came up behind me while I was watchin' my prisoner, and he took hold of me with a grip that would have crushed a granite tombstone. He threw me on my back, and with one knee on my chest, so pressed the life out of me that I couldn't make a sound, while he cut the ropes that bound my prisoner. Then they tied my hands and feet with the ropes that had been around Teich and shoved a gag in my mouth.

"They waited around here an hour or more until you folks was asleep and then went over to the camp and tried to rob you, I suppose. I heard the shooting and was pretty sure who was doin' it. Did you wing either of 'em, Mrs. Hutchins? Did they get away with anything?"

"I should say they did," Aunt Hannah replied desperately. "They got away with just what they came after—the box of securities that was recovered tonight after being lost ever since my husband's death. I don't suppose now that I will ever see them again."

"You don't tell me!" McKenzie exclaimed. "That's too bad. But I couldn't 'a' helped it if I had seen that fellow comin' and had an even catch with him. I tell you he's the most powerful fellow that ever struck these parts. Why, he could 'ave done up that little fellow with a single swipe of his hand. It was all a put up job. They had a good laugh over it, under their breath, of course, while they was waitin' for the moon to go down."

"Well, let's go back to the tents and wait till morning," Mrs. Hutchins suggested. "There's no use trying to do anything before daylight. That won't be long, thank goodness. It's after 3 o'clock now."

So they returned to their tents, while Mr. McKenzie remained in the abandoned hotel after arming himself with a large club and announcing his intention to ambush those tricky rascals if they returned again.

"I'll get the big fellow first with one blow," he said; "and then I'll handle the other one with bare hands, believe me."

CHAPTER XXV.

SHE HIT THE MARK

Mrs. Hutchins and the Campfire Girls went back to bed, but there was little sleep for any of them before daylight. With the rising of the sun, they were out again, and a tired and haggard company of feminine campers they were.

There was little spirit in the camp. Every one of the campers felt as if she had lost out in the battle of life and there was nothing more ahead of her but gloom. There was not one of the girls who did not love Aunt Hannah as if she had been a life-long friend of hers. The burden of her loss was felt by the whole camp. Perhaps it was the dreadfulness of this new blow and the suffering that it must inflict upon Mrs. Hutchins that caused the girls to realize how great their affection for her had become in the few days most of them had known her.

Nobody thought of breakfast for an hour or two after the last girl in bed had arisen. They gathered together in groups, or all together, and discussed the events of the night, but not one of them suggested a possibility that anything might turn up which would throw a more hopeful light on the actual resulting conditions. What was the use? The men had got possession of the treasure they

sought and the outlook for its recovery was poor indeed.

At daybreak, Mr. McKenzie appeared at the camp and announced that he was going back to his house and telephone to the sheriff information of the latest robbery. This seemed to be about all that could be done and was the only hopeful feature of the conversation that followed his departure.

More than an hour elapsed before any of the girls or Mrs. Hutchins thought of suggesting that they examine the trail left by the tent-burglars in their departure. The suggestion arose as a result of a remark made by Katherine Crane.

"If you shot one of those men," she said; "I'd like to have the satisfaction of knowing it. I wonder if we couldn't find a trail of blood on the ground. That might be worth something. The sheriff might like to know about it if such a trail exists."

"It wouldn't run very far," Mrs. Hutchins said. "They no doubt stopped the flow of blood, if one of them was wounded, before they got very far. However, let's satisfy our curiosity and see what we can find."

Mrs. Hutchins indicated the direction the men had taken, and all started out on a search. The ground was examined a distance of fifty yards from the tent, and, sure enough, close to a spring-rivulet which splashed down a rocky steep toward the main stream in the form of a miniature cascade was found the

beginning of a trail of foreign spots on the grass and weed leaves. These spots were almost of a dull brown now, as a result of their exposure to the atmosphere and chemical action between them and the vegetation on which they rested.

All the girls rushed to the spot as Harriet Newcomb excitedly announced her discovery of the trail. As they were examining the spots to see in what direction they led, Violet Munday announced a new discovery in a manner that thrilled all present as nothing else could have done.

"Oh, I've found it, I've found it!" she exclaimed, and the way she began to leap down the steep descent along the succession of tiny waterfalls was a sight to make one's heart throb in expectant unison.

Nobody else saw the object of her interest until she reached it. Fifty feet from the point where she began her descent she stopped and leaned over and picked up what appeared to be the long metal box that had been recovered from the fireplace in the abandoned hotel in the course of the thrilling adventures of the night just past.

"You shot the man who carried the box and he dropped it and it fell down here," Violet explained in shrill tones. "The bullet must have hit him in the arm and made him drop the box and they didn't dare stop to hunt for it because they were afraid of more bullets."

That seemed the only solution, and months

afterward when the robbers were captured and forced to confess, it proved to be essentially true. But the treasure was not all in the box. As it tumbled down the hill the lid had been knocked open and most of the papers were scattered in all directions.

Now began a diligent search for the bonds and other papers scattered along the course taken by the tumbling box. Most of them were soon discovered, but the search was continued several hours, in order that none might be missed, as Mrs. Hutchins had no list against which to make a check and determine just what the box had contained.

But at last they decided there was no good reason for hunting longer and returned to camp. It was breakfast time, yes, long past breakfast time—after 9 o'clock. Hungry? They surely were, and had a right to be. There was no system about the preparation of the morning meal this time. Everybody got busy, and when at last they sat down, it would have been hard indeed to find a more deservingly, happy company of tired and famished Camp Fire Girls.

* * * * *

Next day Hazel had a long talk with her aunt over the events of the last few days. In the course of the conversation she said:

“Do you remember, Aunt Hannah, that, night before last, when our conversation was interrupted by that shooting, you were telling me how you walked in your sleep when you

were a young girl, and you were at the place in your story where the springboard broke just as the first shot was fired? Who was the young man that rescued you?"

"The man whom I subsequently married, your Uncle Edmund," Aunt Hannah replied.

Near the end of their conversation, Hazel commented at length on the remarkable adventures the members of Flamingo Camp Fire had had and expressed a wonder if they would ever go through other experiences as thrilling as recent ones had been. Doubtless her wonder would have been calmed very much if she could have looked ahead and caught but the faintest motion picture of new adventures in store for them before the close of the present summer season, which will be found presented in narrative form in another volume of this series entitled:

CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT TWIN LAKES

or

The Quest of a Summer Vacation.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
OMAS, ALICE AND LINNA	1
CHAPTER II	
DANGER IN THE AIR	14
CHAPTER III	
JULY THIRD, 1778	27
CHAPTER IV	
THE EASTERN SHORE	39
CHAPTER V	
IN THE WOODS	51
CHAPTER VI	
PUSHING EASTWARD	63
CHAPTER VII	
JABEZ ZITNER	76
CHAPTER VIII	
LINNA'S WOODCRAFT	89
CHAPTER IX	
IN A CIRCLE	101
CHAPTER X	
NEAR THE END	113
CHAPTER XI	
ALL IN VAIN	125
CHAPTER XII	
CONCLUSION	138

CHAPTER I

OMAS, ALICE, AND LINNA

I don't suppose there is any use in trying to find out when the game of "Jack Stones" was first played. No one can tell. It certainly is a good many hundred years old.

All boys and girls know how to play it. There is the little rubber ball, which you toss in the air, catch up one of the odd iron prongs, without touching another, and while the ball is aloft; then you do the same with another, and again with another, until none is left. After that you seize a couple at a time, until all have been used, then three, and four, and so on, with other variations, to the end of the game.

Doubtless your fathers and mothers, if they watch you during the progress of the play, will

think it easy and simple. If they do, persuade them to try it. You will soon laugh at their failure.

Now, when we older folks were young like you, we did not have the regular, scraggly bits of iron and dainty rubber ball. We played with pieces of stones. I suspect more deftness was needed in handling them, than in using the new-fashioned pieces. Certainly, in more trials than I can remember, I never played the game through without a break; but then I was never half so handy as you are at such things: that, no doubt, accounts for it.

Well, a good many years ago, before any of your fathers or mothers were born, a little girl named Alice Ripley sat near her home playing "Jack Stones." It was the first of July, 1778, and although her house was made of logs, had no carpets or stove, but a big fireplace, where all the food was made ready for eating, yet no sweeter or happier girl can be found to-day, if you spend weeks in searching for her. Nor can you come upon a more lovely spot in which to build a home, for it was the famed Wyoming Valley, in Western Pennsylvania.

Now, since some of my young friends may not be acquainted with this place, you will allow me

to tell you that the Wyoming Valley lies between the Blue Ridge and the Alleghany Mountains, and that the beautiful Susquehanna River runs through it.

The valley runs north-east and south-west, and is twenty-one miles long, with an average breadth of three miles. The bottom-lands—that is, those in the lowest portion—are sometimes overflowed when there is an unusual quantity of water in the river. In some places the plains are level, and in others, rolling. The soil is very fertile.

Two mountain ranges hem in the valley. The one on the east has an average height of a thousand feet, and the other about two hundred feet less. The eastern range is steep, mostly barren, and abounds with caverns, clefts, ravines, and forests. The western is not nearly so wild, and is mostly cultivated.

The meaning of the Indian word for Wyoming is “Large Plains,” which like most of the Indian names, fits very well indeed.

The first white man who visited Wyoming was a good Moravian missionary, Count Zinzendorf—in 1742. He toiled among the Delaware Indians who lived there, and those of his faith who followed

him were the means of the conversion of a great many red men. The fierce warriors became humble Christians, who set the best example to wild brethren, and often to the wicked white men.

More than twenty years before the Revolution settlers began making their way into the Wyoming Valley. You would think their only trouble would be with the Indians, who always look with anger upon intruders of that kind, but really their chief difficulty was with white people.

Most of these pioneers came from Connecticut. The successors of William Penn, who had bought Pennsylvania from his king, and then again from the Indians, did not fancy having settlers from other colonies take possession of one of the garden spots of his grant.

I cannot tell you about the quarrels between the settlers from Connecticut and those that were already living in Pennsylvania. Forty of the invaders, as they may be called, put up a fort, which was named on that account Forty Fort. This was in the winter of 1769, and two hundred more pioneers followed them in the spring. The fort stood on the western bank of the river.

The Pennsylvanians, however, had prepared for

them, and the trouble began. During the few years following the New Englanders were three times driven out of the valley, and the men, women and children were obliged to tramp for two hundred miles through the unbroken wilderness to their old homes. But they rallied and came back again and at last were strong enough to hold their ground. About this time the mutterings of the American Revolution began to be heard, and the Pennsylvanians and New Englanders forgot their enmity and became brothers in their struggle for independence.

Among the pioneers from Connecticut who put up their old-fashioned log-houses in Wyoming were George Ripley and his wife Ruth. They were young, frugal, industrious, and worthy people. They had but one child—a boy named Benjamin. But after awhile Alice was added to the family and at the date of which I am telling you she was six years and her brother thirteen years old.

Mr. Ripley was absent with the continental army under General Washington, fighting the battles of his country. Benjamin, on this spring day, was visiting some friends of his further down the valley; so that when Alice came forth to play “Jack

Stones" alone, no one was in sight, though her next neighbor lived hardly two hundred yards away.

I wish you could have seen her as she looked on that summer afternoon. She had been helping, so far as she was able, her mother in the house, until the parent told her to go outdoors and amuse herself. She was chubby, plump, healthy, with round pink cheeks, yellow hair tied in a coil at the back of her head, and her big eyes were as blue, and clear, and bright as they could be.

She wore a brown homespun dress—that is to say, the materials had been woven by the deft fingers of her mother, with the aid of the old spinning-wheel, which in those days formed a part of every household. The dark stockings were knitted by the same busy fingers, with the help of the flashing needles; and the shoes, put together by Peleg Quintin, the humpbacked shoemaker, were heavy and coarse, and did not fit any too well.

The few simple articles of underwear were all home-made, clean, and comfortable, and the same could be said of the clothing of the brother and of the mother herself.

Alice came running out of the open front door, bounding off the big flat stone which served as a step, with a single leap, and, running to a spot of green grass a few yards away, where there was not a bit of dirt or a speck of dust, she sat down and began the game of which I told you at the opening of this story.

Alice was left-handed. So when she took position, she leaned over to the right, supporting her body with that arm, while with the other hand she tossed the little jagged pieces of stone aloft, snatching up the others, and letting the one that was going up and down in the air drop into her chubby palm.

She had been playing perhaps ten minutes, when she found someone was watching her.

She did not see him at first, but heard a low, deep "Huh!" partly at one side and partly behind her.

Instead of glancing around, she finished the turn of the game on which she was engaged just then. That done, she clasped all the Jack Stones in her hand, assumed the upright posture, and looked behind her.

"I thought it was you, Omas," she said with a

merry laugh; "do you want to play Jack Stones with me?"

If you could have seen the person whom she thus addressed, you would have thought it a strange way of speaking.

He was an Indian warrior, belonging to the tribe of Delawares. Those who knew about him said he was one of the fiercest red men that ever went on the war-path. A few years before, there had been a massacre of the settlers, and Omas was foremost among the Indians who swung the tomahawk and fired his rifle at the white people.

He was tall, sinewy, active, and powerful. Three stained eagle feathers were fastened on his crown in the long black hair, and his hunting-shirt, leggings, and moccasins were bright with different colored beads and fringes. In the red sash which passed around his waist were thrust a hunting-knife and tomahawk, while one hand clasped a cumbersome rifle, which, like all firearms of those times, was used with ramrod and flint-lock.

Omas would have had a rather pleasing face had he let it alone; but his people love bright colors, and he was never seen without a lot of paint daubed over it. This was made up of black, white, and

yellow circles, lines, and streaks that made him look frightful.

But Alice was not scared at all. She and Omas were old friends. Nearly a year before he stopped at their cabin one stormy night and asked for something to eat. Mrs. Ripley gave him plenty of coarse brown, well-baked bread and cold meat, and allowed him to sleep on the floor until morning.

Benjamin was rather shy of the fierce-looking Delaware, but little Alice took to him at first. She brought him a basin of water, and asked him to please wash his face.

The startled mother gently reproved her; but Omas did that which an Indian rarely does—smiled. He spoke English unusually well, and knew why the child had proposed to him to use the water.

He told her that he had a little girl that he called Linna, about the same age as Alice. Upon hearing this, what did Alice do, but climb upon the warrior's knee and ask him to tell her all about Linna. Well, the result was, that an affection was formed between this wild warrior and the gentle little girl.

Omas promised to bring his child to see Alice, who, with her mother's permission, said she would return the visit. There can be no doubt that the Delaware often went a long way out of his course, for no other reason than to spend an hour or less with Alice Ripley. The brother and mother always made him feel welcome, and to the good parent the influence of her child upon the savage red man had a peculiar interest which nothing else in the world could possess for her.

So you understand why it was that Alice did not start and show any fear when she looked around and saw the warrior standing less than ten feet off, and attentively watching her.

"You can't play Jack Stones as well as I," she said, looking saucily up at him.

"I beat you," was his reply, as he strode forward and sat down cross-legged on the grass.

"I'd like to see you do it! You think you're very smart, don't you?"

A shadowy smile played around the stern mouth, and the Delaware, who had studied the simple game long enough to understand it, began the sport under the observant eyes of his little mistress.

While both were intent on the amusement, Mrs.

Ripley came to the door and stood wonderingly looking at them.

"It does seem as if Indians are human beings like the rest of us," was her thought; "but who could resist her gentle ways?"

Up went the single stone in the air, and Omas grabbed the batch that were lying on the ground, and then caught the first as it came down.

"That won't do!" called Alice, seizing the brawny hand, which—sad to say—had been stained with blood as innocent as hers; "you didn't do that fair!"

"What de matter?" he asked, looking reproachfully into the round face almost against his own.

"I'll show you how. Now, I lay those three on the ground like that. Then I toss up this, pick up one without touching any of the others, keep it in my hand and pick up the next—see?"

She illustrated her instruction by her work, while her pupil listened and stared.

"I know—I know," he said quickly. "I show you."

Then the wag of a Delaware tossed the first stone fully twenty feet aloft, caught up the others and took that on the fly.

"I never saw anybody as dumb as you," was the comment. "What is the use of your trying? You couldn't learn to play Jack Stones in ever so long."

She was about to try him again, when, child-like, she darted off upon a widely different subject, for it had just come into her little head.

"Omas, when you were here the other day, you promised that the next time you came to see me you would bring Linna."

"Dat so—Omas promise."

"Then why haven't you done as you said?"

"Omas never speak with double tongue; he bring Linna with him."

"You did?—where is she?" asked Alice, springing to her feet, clasping her hands, and looking expectantly around.

The Delaware emitted a shrill, tremulous whistle and immediately from the wood, several rods behind them, came running the oddest-looking little girl anyone could have met in a long time.

Her face was as round as that of Alice, her long, black hair hung loosely over her shoulders, her small eyes were as black as jet, her nose a pug, her teeth as white and regular as were ever seen, while

her dress was a rude imitation of her father's, except the skirt came below her knees. Her feet were as small as a doll's, and encased in the beaded little moccasins, were as pretty as they could be.

"That is Linna," said the proud father as she came obediently forward.

CHAPTER II

DANGER IN THE AIR

Little Linna, daughter of Omas, the Delaware warrior, was of the same age as Alice Ripley. The weather was warm, and although she wore tiny moccasins to protect her feet, she scorned the superfluous stockings and under-garments that formed a part of the other's apparel.

Her hair was as black, abundant, and almost as long as her father's; but her face was clean, and perhaps in honor of the occasion, she too, sported a gaudy eagle feather in her hair.

She bounded out of the green wood like a fawn but as she drew near her parent and Alice, her footsteps became slower, and she halted a few paces away, hung her head, with her fore-finger between her pretty white teeth--for all the world like any white girl of her years.

But Alice did not allow her to remain embarrassed. She had been begging for this visit, and

now, when she saw her friend, she ran forward took her plump little hand and said—

“Linna, I am real glad you have come!”

Omas had risen to his feet, and watched the girls with an affection and interest which found no expression on his painted face. His child looked timidly up at him and walked slowly forward, her hand clasped in that of Alice. She did not speak, but when her escort sat down on the grass, she did the same.

“Linna, do you know how to play Jack Stones?” asked Alice, picking up the pebbles.

Linna shook her head quickly several times, but her lips remained mute.

“Your father thought he knew how, but he don’t; he doesn’t play fair, either. Let me show you, so you can beat him when you go home.”

Alice set to work, while the bright black eyes watched every movement.

“Now, do you want to try it?” she asked, after going through the game several times.

Linna nodded her head with the same bird-like quickness, and reached out her chubby hand.

Her father and Alice watched her closely. She made several failures at first, all of which were

patiently explained by her tutor; by-and-by she went through the performance from beginning to end without a break.

Alice clapped her hands with delight, and Omas—certain that no grown up person saw him—smiled with pleasure.

“Doesn’t she know how to talk?” asked Alice, looking up at the warrior.

Omas spoke somewhat sharply to his child in the Delaware tongue. She started, and looking at Alice, asked—

“Do—you think me play well?”

Alice was delighted to find she could make herself understood so easily. It was wonderful how she had learned to speak English so early in life.

“I guess you can,” was the ready reply of Alice; “your father can’t begin to play as well. When you go home you can show your mamma how to play Jack Stones. Have you any brothers and sisters?”

“No; me have no brother—no sister.”

“That’s too bad! I’ve got a big brother Ben. He isn’t home now, but he will be here to supper. He’s a nice boy, and you will like him. Let’s go in

the house now to see mamma, and you can teach me how to talk Indian."

Both girls bounded to their feet, and hand in hand, walked to the door, with Omas gravely stalking after them.

Mrs. Ripley had learned of the visitor, and stood on the threshold to welcome her. She took her by the hand and led her inside. Omas paused, as if in doubt whether he should follow; but her invitation to him was so cordial, that he stepped within and seated himself on a chair.

That afternoon and night could never be forgotten by Alice Ripley. In a very little while she and her visitor were on the best of terms, laughing, romping, and chasing each other in and out of doors, just as if they were twin sisters that had never been separated from each other.

When Mrs. Ripley asked Omas for how long a time he could leave his little child with them, he said he must take her back that evening. His wigwam was a good many miles away in the woods, and he would have to travel all night to reach the village of his tribe.

Mrs. Ripley, however, pleaded so hard, that he

consented to let his child stay until he came back the next day or soon thereafter for her.

When he rose to go, the long summer day was drawing to a close. He spoke to Linna in their native tongue. She was sitting on the floor just then, playing with a wonderful rag baby, but was up in a flash, and followed him outside.

"Wait a moment and she will come back," said Mrs. Ripley to her own child. She knew what the movement meant: Omas did not wish anyone to see him and Linna.

On the outside he moved a little to the left, and glanced around to make sure that no person was looking that way. Then he lifted the little one from the ground, she threw her arms around his neck, and he pressed her to his breast and kissed her several times with great warmth. Then he set her down, and she ran laughing into the house, while he strode off to the woods.

But at the moment of entering them he stopped abruptly, wheeled about, and walked slowly back toward the cabin.

Upon the return of Linna, Mrs. Ripley stepped to the front door to look for her son. He was not in sight, but Omas had stopped again hardly a

rod distant. He stood a moment, looking fixedly at her, and then beckoned with his free hand for her to approach.

Without hesitation she stepped off the broad flat stone and went to him.

"What is it, Omas?" she asked in an undertone, pausing in front of him, and gazing up into the grim, painted countenance.

The Delaware returned the look for a few seconds, as if studying how to say what was in his mind. Then in a voice lower even than hers, he said—

"You—little girl—big boy—go way soon—must not stay here."

"Why do you say that, Omas?"

"Iroquois like leaves on trees—white men, call Tories—soon come down here—kill all white people—kill you—kill little girl, big boy—if you stay here."

The pioneer's wife had heard the same rumors for days past. She knew there was cause for fear, for nearly all the able-bodied men in Wyoming were absent with the patriot army, fighting for independence.

The inhabitants in the valley had begged

Congress to send some soldiers to protect them, and the relatives of the women and children had asked again and again that they might go home to save their loved ones from the Tories and Indians; but the prayer was refused. The soldiers in the army were too few to be spared, and no one away from Wyoming believed the danger as great as it was.

But the people themselves knew the peril, and did their best to prepare for it.

But who should know more about the Indians and Tories than Omas, the great Delaware warrior?

When, therefore, he said these words to Mrs. Ripley, that woman's heart beat faster. She heard the laughter and prattle of the children in the house, and she thought of that bright boy, playing with his young friends not far away.

"Where can we go?" she asked in the same guarded voice.

"With Omas," was the prompt reply; "hide in wigwam of Omas. Nobody hurt pale-face friend of Omas."

It was a trying situation. The brave woman, who had passed through many dangers with her husband, knew what a visit from the Tories and

Indians meant; but she shrank from leaving Wyoming, and all her friends and neighbors.

"When will they come?" she asked; "will it be in a few weeks or in a few days?"

"Getting ready now; Brandt with Iroquois—Butler with Tory—soon be here."

"But do you mean that we shall all go with you to-night?"

The Delaware was silent for a few seconds. His active brain was busy, reviewing the situation.

"No," he finally said; "stay here till Omas come back; then go with him—all go—den no one be hurt."

"Very well; we will wait till you come to us again. We will take good care of Linna."

And without another word the Delaware turned once more, strode to the forest, which was then in fullest leaf, and vanished among the trees.

Mrs. Ripley walked slowly back to the door. On the threshold she halted, and looked around again for her absent boy. It was growing dark, and she began to feel a vague alarm for him.

A whistle fell on her ear. It was the sweetest music she had ever heard, for it came from the lips of her boy.

He was in sight, coming along the well-worn path that led in front of the other dwellings and to her own door. When he saw her, he waved his hand in salutation, but could not afford to break in on the vigorous melody which kept his lips puckered.

She saw he was carrying something on his shoulder. A second glance showed that it was one of the heavy rifles used by the pioneers a hundred years ago. The sight—taken with what Omas had just said—filled her heart with forebodings.

She waited until the lad came up. He kissed her affectionately, and then in the offhand manner of a big boy, let the butt of the gun drop on the ground, leaned the top away from him, and glancing from it to his mother, asked—

“What do you think of it?”

“It seems to be a good gun. Whose is it?”

“*Mine*,” was the proud response. “Colonel Butler ordered that it be given to me, and I’m to use it, too, mother.”

“For what purpose?”

“The other Colonel Butler—you know he is a cousin to ours—has got a whole lot of Tories” (who, you know, were Americans fighting against

their countrymen) "and Indians, and they're coming down to wipe out Wyoming; but I guess they will find it a harder job than they think."

And to show his contempt for the danger, the muscular lad lifted the weighty weapon to a level, and pretended to sight it at a tree on the edge of the wood.

"I wish that was a Tory or one of those Six Nation Indians—wouldn't I drop him!"

The mother could not share the buoyancy of her son. She stepped outside, so as to be beyond the hearing of the little ones.

"Omas has been here; that is his little girl that you hear laughing with Alice. He has told me the same as you—the Tories and Indians are coming, and he wants us to flee with him."

"What does he mean by that?" asked the half-indignant boy.

"He says they will put us all to death, and if we do not go with him, we will be killed too."

The handsome face of Benjamin Ripley took on an expression of scorn, and as he straightened up, he seemed to become several inches taller.

"He forgets that *I* am with you! Omas is very kind; but he and his Tory friends had better look

out for themselves. Why, with the men at the fort, Colonel Butler will have several hundred."

"But they are mostly old men and boys."

"Well," said the high-spirited lad, with a twinkle of his fine hazel eyes, "add up a lot of old men and boys and the average is the same number of middle-aged men, isn't it? Don't you worry, mother—things are all right. If Omas comes back give him our thanks, and tell him we are not going to sneak off when we are needed at home."

It was hard to resist the contagion of Ben's hopefulness. The mother not only loved but respected him as much as she could have done had he been several years older. He had been her mainstay for the two years past, during which the father was absent with the patriot army; and she came to lean upon him more and more, though her heart sank when Ben began to talk of following his father into the ranks, to help in the struggle for independence.

She found herself looking upon the situation as Ben did. If so great danger threatened Wyoming, it would be cowardly for them to leave their friends to their fate. It was clear all could not find safety

by going, and she would feel she was doing wrong if she gave no heed to the others.

Ben was tall and strong for his years, and the fact that he had taken the gun from Colonel Butler to be used in taking care of the settlement bound the youth in honor to do so.

"It shall be as you say," said the mother; "I cannot be as hopeful as you, but it is our duty to stay. We will not talk about it before the children."

"I want to see how a little Indian girl looks," muttered Ben with a laugh, following his mother into the house.

Alice caught sight of him, and was in his arms the next instant, while Linna rose to her feet and stood with her forefinger between her teeth, shyly studying the newcomer.

"Helloa, Linna! How are you?" he called, setting down his young sister and catching up the little Indian. Not only that, but he gave her a resounding smack on her dusky cheek.

"I always like pretty little girls, and I'm going to be your beau: what do you say? Is it a bargain?"

It is not to be supposed that the Delaware miss

caught the whole meaning of this momentous question. She was a little overwhelmed by the rush of the big boy's manner, and nodded her head about a dozen times.

"There, Alice; do you understand that?" he asked, making the room ring with his merry laughter; "I'm going to be Linna's beau. How do you like it?"

"I'm glad for you, but I—guess—I oughter be sorry for Linna."

CHAPTER III

JULY THIRD, 1778

While Ben Ripley was frolicking with little Alice and her Indian friend Linna, the mother prepared the evening meal. The candles were lighted, and they took their places at the table.

All this was new and strange to Linna. In her own home, she was accustomed to sit on the ground and use only her fingers for knife and fork when taking food; but she was observant and quick, and knowing how it had been with her, her friends soon did away with her embarrassment. The mother cut her meat into small pieces, spread butter—which the visitor looked at askance—on the brown bread, and she had but to do as the rest, and all went well.

A few minutes after supper both girls became drowsy, and Mrs. Ripley, candle in hand, conducted them upstairs to the small room set apart for their use.

This was another novel experience for the visitor. She insisted at first upon lying on the hard floor, for never in her life had she touched a bed; but after awhile, she became willing to share the couch with her playmate.

Alice knelt down by the side of the little trundle bed and said her prayers, as she always did; but, Linna could not understand what it meant. She wonderingly watched her until she was through, and then with some misgiving, clambered among the clothes, and the mother tucked her up, though the night was so warm they needed little covering.

Mrs. Ripley felt that she ought to tell the dusky child about her heavenly Father, and to teach her to pray. She therefore sat down on the edge of the bed, and in simple words began the wonderful story of the Saviour, who gave His life to save her as well as all others.

Alice dropped asleep right away, but Linna lay motionless, with her round black eyes fixed on the face of the lady, drinking in every word she said. By-and-by, however, the eyelids began to droop and the good woman ceased. Who shall tell what precious seed was thus sown in that cabin in Wyoming, more than a hundred years ago?

While Mrs. Ripley was talking upstairs, she heard voices below; so that she knew Ben had a visitor. As she descended, she recognized a neighbor who lived on the other side of the river.

"I called," said he, "to tell you that you must lose no time in moving into Forty Fort with your little girl."

"You do not mean right away?"

"Not to-night, but the first thing in the morning."

"Is the danger so close as that?"

"Our scouts report the Tory Colonel Butler with a large force of whites and Indians marching down the valley."

"But do you not expect to repel them?"

"We are sure of that," was the confident reply, "but it won't do for any of the women and children to be exposed. The Indians will scatter, and cut off all they can. Others of our friends are out warning the people, and we must have them all in a safe place."

"Will you wait for our enemies to attack the fort?"

"I believe our Colonel Butler favors that; but

others, and among them myself and Ben, favor marching out and meeting them."

"That's it," added the lad, shaking his head. "I believe in showing them we are not scared. Colonel Butler got leave of absence to come to Wyoming; he has some regulars with him, and with all our men and boys, we'll teach the other Colonel Butler a lesson he won't forget as long as he lives."

"Well, if you think it best, we will move into the fort with the other people until the danger is past."

"Yes, mother; I will fight better knowing that you and Alice are safe. There's Linna! What about her?"

"Who's Linna?" asked the visitor.

"She is the little child of Omas, the Delaware warrior. He brought her here this afternoon to make Alice a visit, and promised to call to-morrow for her. Will it be safe to wait until he comes?"

The neighbor shook his head.

"You mustn't take any chances. Why don't you turn her loose to take care of herself? She can do it."

"I couldn't," the mother hastened to say;

"Omas left her in our care, and I must not neglect her. She will go with us."

"I don't think it will be safe for her father to come after her, when the flurry is over."

"Why not?"

"He will be with the Iroquois, even though his tribe doesn't like them any too well; for the Iroquois are the conquerors of the Delawares, and drove them off their hunting-grounds."

"Well," said Mrs. Ripley, with a sigh; "even if he never comes for her, she will always have a home with us."

The dwelling of the Ripleys was on the eastern shore of the Susquehanna. On the other side Fort Wintermoot and Forty Fort, the former being at the upper end of the valley. That would be the first one reached by the invaders, and the expectation was that it would give up whenever ordered to do so, for nearly all in it were friends of the Tories.

It was evident that when Omas left his child with her friends, and spoke of returning the next day, or soon thereafter, he did not know how near the invasion was. Mrs. Ripley expected that when he did learn it, he would hasten back for her.

The night, however, passed without his appearance, and the hot July sun came up over the forests on the eastern bank of the river, and still he remained away. It looked as if he had decided to to let her take her chances while he joined the invaders in their work of destruction and woe.

Mrs. Ripley would have been willing to wait longer, but she was urged not to lose another hour. The frightened settlers were not allowed to take anything but their actual necessities with them, for the cramped quarters in Forty Fort, where a number of cabins were erected, would be crowded to the utmost to make room for the hundreds who might clamor for admission. The quarters, indeed, were so scant that many camped outside, holding themselves ready to rush within, should it become necessary.

Little Linna was filled with wonder when she saw her friends preparing to move and knew she was going with them. But she helped in her way as much as she could and asked no questions. There was no need, in fact, for Alice asked enough for both.

And just here I must relate you a little history. On the last days of June, 1778, Colonel John

Butler, with about four hundred soldiers—partly made up of Tories—and six or seven hundred Indians, entered the head of Wyoming Valley, As I have said, he was a cousin of Colonel Zebulon Butler, who commanded the patriots and did all he could to check the invaders.

Reaching Fort Wintermoot, the British officer sent in a demand for its surrender. The submission was made, and the invaders then came down the valley and ordered the Connecticut people to surrender Forty Fort and the settlements.

Colonel Zebulon Butler had under him, to quote the historical account, “two hundred and thirty enrolled men, and seventy old people, boys, civil magistrates and other volunteers.” They formed six companies which were mustered at Forty Fort, where the families of the settlers on the east side of the river had taken refuge.

Colonel Zebulon Butler, upon receiving the summons, called a council of war. This was on the 3d of July. The officers believed that a little delay would be best, in the hope of the arrival of reinforcements; but nearly all the men were so clamorous to march out and give the invaders battle, that it was decided to do so.

“You are going into great danger,” remarked the leader, as he mounted his horse and placed himself at the head of the patriots, “but I will go as far as any of you.”

At three o'clock in the afternoon the column, numbering about three hundred, marched from the fort with drums beating and colors flying. They moved up the valley, with the river on the right and a marsh on the left, until they arrived at Fort Wintermoot, which had been set on fire by the enemy to give the impression they were withdrawing from the neighborhood.

As you may well believe, the movements of the patriots were watched with deep interest by those left behind. The women and children clustered along the river bank and strained their eyes in the direction of Fort Wintermoot, the black smoke from which rolled down the valley and helped to shut out their view.

There was hardly one among the spectators that had not a loved relative with the defenders. It might be a tottering grandfather, a sturdy son, who, though a boy, was inspired with the deepest fervor, and eager to risk his life for the sake of his mother or sister, whose hearts almost stopped

beating in the painful suspense which must continue until the battle was decided.

Alice was too young fully to understand the peril in which Ben was placed. She had kissed him good-bye when he ran to take his place with the others, and with a light jest on his lips about her and Linna, he had snatched a kiss from the little Delaware's swarthy cheek.

The mother added a few cheering words to the children, and it was a striking sight when they and a number of others, about their age or under, began playing with all the merriment of children who never dream that the world contains such afflictions as sorrow, woe, and death.

It was easy to follow the course of the patriots for a time after they were beyond sight, by the sound of their drums and the shrill whistling of several fifes.

In those days it was much more common than now for people to drink intoxicating liquors. Just before the patriots started up the valley, I am sorry to say, a few of the men drank more than they should. It has been claimed by some that but for this things would have gone differently on

that day, which will live for ever as one of the saddest in American history.

By-and-by the anxious people near the fort noticed that the sound of drums and fifes had ceased, and the reports of firearms were heard. They knew from this that the opposing forces were making ready for the conflict, and the suspense became painful indeed.

Then amid the rattle of musketry sounded the whoops of the Iroquois. The battle was on. Fighting began about four o'clock in the afternoon. Colonel Zebulon Butler ordered his men to fire, and at each discharge to advance a step. The fire was regular and steady, and the Americans continued to gain ground, having the advantage where it was open. Despite the exertions of the invaders their line gave way, and but for the help of the Indians they would have been routed.

The flanking party of red men kept up a galling fire on the right, and the patriots dropped fast. The Indians on the Tory left were divided into six bands who kept up a continuous yelling which did much to inspirit each other, while the deadly aim told sadly upon the Americans.

The most powerful body of Indians was in a

swamp on the left of the patriots, and by-and-by they outflanked them. The Americans tried to manoeuvre so as to face the new danger, but some of them mistook the order for one to retreat. Everything was thrown into confusion. Colonel Zebulon Butler, seeing how things were going, galloped up and down between the opposing lines, calling out—

“Don’t leave me, my children. Stand by me and the victory is ours!”

But it was too late. The patriots could not be rallied. They were far outnumbered, and once thrown into a panic, with the captain of every company slain, the day was lost.

You cannot picture the distress of the women, children, and feeble old men waiting at Forty Fort the issue of the battle.

The sorrowful groups on the bank of the river listened to the sounds of conflict, and read the meaning as they came to their ears.

The steady, regular firing raised their hopes at first. They knew their sons and friends were fighting well, despite the shouts of the Indians borne down the valley on the sultry afternoon.

By-and-by the firing grew more scattering, and

instead of being so far up the river as at first, it was coming closer.

This could mean but one thing: the patriots were retreating before the Tories and Indians.

One old man, nearly four-score years of age, who pleaded to go into the battle, but was too feeble, could not restrain his feelings. He walked back and forth, inspired with new strength and full of hope, until the scattered firing and its approach left no doubt of its meaning.

He paused in his nervous, hobbling pace, and said to the white-faced woman standing breathlessly near—

“Our boys are retreating: they have been beaten—all hope is gone!”

The next moment two horsemen galloped into sight.

“Colonel Butler and Colonel Denison!” said the old man, recognizing them; “they bring sad news.”

It was true. They rode their horses on a dead run, and reining up at the fort, where the people crowded around them, they leaped to the ground, and Colonel Butler said—

“Our boys have been driven from the field, and the Tories and Indians are at their heels!”

CHAPTER IV

THE EASTERN SHORE

Young Ben Ripley made a good record on that eventful 3d of July. He loaded and fired as steadily as a veteran. The smoke of the guns, the wild whooping of the Iroquois Indians, the sight of his friends and neighbors continually dropping to the ground, some of them at his elbow, the deafening discharge of the rifles—all these and the dreadful swirl and rush of events dazed him at times; but he kept at it with a steadiness which caused more than one expression of praise from the officers nearest him.

All at once he found himself mixed up in the confusion caused by the attempt to wheel a part of the line to face the flanking assailants, and the mistake of many that it was an order to retreat.

He did not know what it meant, for it seemed

to him that a dozen officers were shouting conflicting orders at the same moment. A number of men threw down their guns and made a wild rush to get away, several falling over each other in the frantic scramble; others bumped together, and above the din of the conflict sounded the voice of Colonel Butler, as he rode back and forth through the smoke, begging his troops not to leave him, and victory would be theirs.

Seeing the hopeless tangle, the Indians swarmed out of the swamp, and by their savage attack and renewed shouts made the hubbub and confusion tenfold worse.

Somebody ran so violently against Ben that he was thrown to the ground. He was on his feet in an instant and turned to see who did it. It was a soldier fleeing for life from an Iroquois warrior.

Ben raised his gun, took quick aim and pulled the trigger, but no report followed. He had forgotten his weapon was unloaded.

Other forms obtruded between him and the couple, and he could not see the result of the pursuit and attack. Despite all he could do, he was forced back by the panic-stricken rush around and against him.

Suddenly a wild cry reached him. An Iroquois with painted face rushed upon him with uplifted tomahawk, but he was yet several paces away, when another warrior seized his arm and wrenched him to one side.

"Run—go fast—don't stay!" commanded the Indian that had saved the youth, furiously motioning to him.

"If my gun were loaded," replied Ben, though his voice was unheard in the din, "I wouldn't go till I did something more. Helloa! is that you, Omas?"

It was the Delaware that had turned the assault aside.

A couple of bounds placed him beside the lad, and he caught his arm with a grip of iron.

It was of no use trying to hold back. Omas half-running, half leaping, drove his way like a wedge through the surging swarm. His left hand closed around the upper arm of Ben, while his right grasped his tomahawk, he having thrown aside his rifle.

The boy was repeatedly jerked almost off his feet. He could run fast, but was not equal to this warrior, who forged along with resistless might.

Twice did an Iroquois make for the young prisoner, as he supposed the lad to be, but a warning motion of the tomahawk upheld by Omas repelled him.

The Delaware was prudent, and instead of keeping in the midst of the surging mass, worked to one side, so that they were soon comparatively free from the tumultuous throng.

There was no attempt at conversation between the Delaware and Ben. The boy knew what was meant by this rough kindness. The day was lost, and his thoughts went out to the loved ones waiting down the valley to learn the result of the battle. He wanted to get to them as quickly as he could.

The rush carried them beyond the main body of fugitives, though not out of danger, for the Iroquois were pursuing hard; but soon Omas loosened his grip and dropped the arm of the lad. They were far enough removed from the swirl to exchange words.

"Where moder—where Alice?" asked the Delaware, as if he had no concern for his own child.

"At Forty Fort."

"Linna with them?"

"Yes; they are together with the other folks."

“Go dere—tell cross riber—make haste to Del’mware.”

This command meant that the little party should hurry to the eastern side of the Susquehanna, and start for the settlements on the Upper Delaware. The nearest town was Stroudsburg, sixty miles distant, and the way led through a dismal forest.

The words of Omas showed, too, that he knew what was coming. Though the British Colonel Butler might accept the surrender and strive to give fair treatment to the prisoners, he would find it hard to restrain the Tories and Indians.

All that could be done was for the fugitives to flee, without an hour’s delay. They were already flocking to the river in the effort to reach the other side. A good many hid among the grass and undergrowth on Monacaey Island, where the Tories and Indians followed, and hunted them out without mercy.

Those who were wise enough to set out in time had a chance of arriving at the settlements on the Upper Delaware, though much suffering was sure to follow, since there was no time to prepare food to take with them.

The remark of Omas prompted Ben's words—

"How can I get mother, and Alice and Linna to the other side? They cannot swim the river."

"Linna swim," was the somewhat proud answer; she take care of Alice—you take care of moder."

"I might at any other time, but with the people crowding around us, and the Indians at our heels and shooting down all they can, what chance have we? Why can't you come with me and help them?"

No doubt the Delaware had asked himself the question, for he answered it not by words, but by breaking into a loping trot for Forty Fort, with Ben running at his side.

He halted before reaching the refuge, and turned aside among the bushes overhanging the edge of the river, his actions showing he was searching for something.

He speedily found a canoe, probably his own. It had been so skillfully hidden among the dense undergrowth that one might have passed within a couple of paces without seeing it.

He picked it up as if it were a toy boat and set it down in the water.

“Go bring moder—bring Alice—bring Linna.”

Ben was off like a shot, for he knew there was not a minute to throw away. It was the season when the days were longest, and two or three hours must pass before it would be fully night.

It would not do for Omas to go with Ben. His appearance at the fort would add to the panic, and be almost certain to bring about a conflict with some of the whites. It was his province to guard the precious canoe from being taken by other fugitives.

Ben Ripley now thought only of his loved ones. He knew the anguish his mother would suffer until she learned he was safe, and he forced his way to the spot where he had parted from her.

It was a sad experience. Old men, women and children with white faces, were rushing to and fro, wringing their hands and wailing, searching for those whom they never again would see in this life; crowding into the little fort, as if they knew a minute's delay would be fatal, some making for the river, into which they plunged in a wild effort to reach the eastern shore, while among the frantic masses appeared here and there a fugitive from the scene of battle, perhaps wounded and telling his

dreadful story of the defeat; with all the woeful consequences that were certain to follow.

With much difficulty and some rough work the lad reached the spot where he had bidden his mother and the children good-bye, but none of the three was in sight. They had been swept aside by the rush of the terrified people.

"They must be somewhere near——"

A cry sounded above the tumult, and before he could learn where it came from, the arms of his mother were about his neck.

"Thank Heaven! my boy is safe! You do not know what I have suffered. I could learn nothing about you. Are you hurt?"

"Not a scratch—which is more than many other poor fellows can say. Where are the children?"

A tiny hand was slipped into his own, and looking down, there stood Linna, with her forefinger between her teeth, looking shyly up at him. There could be no doubt she felt fully acquainted.

Alice came forward on the other side. Neither understood the cause of the turmoil about them. They were not scared, but were awed into silence.

"I saw Omas," explained Ben to his mother; "he saved me from the fate of many others."

"Where is he?"

"A little way off, under the bank, waiting with his canoe to take us across the river."

"What's that for?"

"He says we must hurry through the woods for the settlements on the Upper Delaware. Every hour that we stay increases our danger."

"Let me take Alice; lead the way."

Clasping tight the hand of Linna, with his mother at his heels, Ben pushed for the point where he had left the Delaware a few minutes before.

Strange that though the distance was not far and the confusion seemed to be increasing every minute, the little party had not gone half way when they were checked by one of the men that had been in the battle. He was slightly wounded, and under the influence of liquor.

"Who's that you've got with you?" he demanded, looking down at Linna, who saw no danger in the act.

"A friend of Alice and me."

"She looks like an Injin," added the soldier, scowling threateningly at her; "if she is, I want her."

"I told you she is a friend of ours—get out of my way!"

The soldier's condition enabled Ben to tumble him over on his back by means of a vigorous shove. Before he could steady himself and get upon his feet again, the others were beyond reach.

I am sure he would not have acted that way, had he been in the possession of his senses.

When Ben parted from Omas, he was without a rifle, but on joining him again, the warrior had a fine weapon in his hand. It was not the one with which he appeared at the house. The lad might have guessed how he got it, but he did not ask any questions, nor seem to notice it.

As the party came up, Omas merely glanced at Mrs. Ripley and her child, but did not speak. As for his own little girl, he gave her no notice. Young as she was, she understood him, and did not claim any attention from him. If they had been alone, she would have been in his arms with their cheeks together.

"Go 'cross," said he, pointing toward the other shore.

"Ben has told me what you said; we are ready," replied Mrs. Ripley.

He held the canoe steady and motioned her to take her place in it. She did so, and Alice nestled at her feet, being careful not to stir, for such frail craft are easily upset.

The canoe was small, and the weight of the mother and child sank it quite low, though it would hold another adult.

"Get in," added Omas to the lad.

Ben obeyed. He knew all about such boats, and could have paddled it across had there been a paddle to use, but there was none.

When the Delaware laid his rifle inside with Ben's, it was evident he intended to swim, towing or shoving the boat.

"Come, Linna, there's just room for you," added the youth, reaching out his hand for the dusky girl.

Instead of obeying, she looked up at her father and said something to which he made answer brusquely, as it sounded to the others.

Retreating several paces from shore, she ran nimbly to the edge of the bank, and with a leap splashed away beyond the bow of the canoe, and began swimming like a fish for the eastern shore.

It was a great treat for her, even though she

did not remove any of her clothing. The weather was sultry, and the bath refreshingly cool. Not comprehending the sad scenes around her, she dived and splashed, and frolicked, easily keeping in advance of the boat.

Truth to tell, the canoe had all it could hold, and Omas who swam at the stern, handled it with care to prevent it overturning. The water rose almost to the gunwales, and a little jolt or carelessness would have capsized it.

The Delaware swam high out of water. He knew the boat would attract the attention of some of his own people on the bank, who, if they thought the occupants were escaping, would either pursue or fire on them.

The sight of the Indian, however, at the stern would make it appear that they were already prisoners, and the other warriors would give their attention elsewhere.

Omas kept clear of Monacacy Island, and by-and-by his feet touched ground. Before that, the dripping Linna had run out on land, and so the whole party safely reached the eastern shore.

CHAPTER V

IN THE WOODS

You have not forgotten what I told you about the mountain range, which shuts in Wyoming Valley, on the east. It is a thousand feet in height, abounding with ravines, clefts, rocks, boulders and the most rugged kind of places.

The fugitives who fled from the Susquehanna to escape the Indians had to make their way over these mountains, and then find their way through sixty miles of trackless woods to the Delaware River. A great many succeeded in doing so, but the deaths and sufferings in the vast stretch of forest gave it the dreadful name of "The Shades of Death," by which it is often referred to even to this day.

Omas swam at the rear of the small canoe, as I told you, with Mrs. Ripley and her two children seated inside and balancing themselves with great care to prevent the heavily loaded craft from sinking or overturning.

More than one Seneca or Oneida Indian, or perhaps a Tory, that had chased some terrified fugitive to the edge of the river, halted and made ready to fire upon the canoe, whose occupants were seen to be three white persons.

When they looked again, however, they observed the head and shoulders of an Indian warrior, who was plainly propelling the craft in front of him. That was enough to satisfy them.

On the way over, Linna, the little Indian girl, amused herself by diving under the canoe, sometimes appearing on one side and then on the other, sometimes in front and then at the rear. She even ventured to impose upon her father by splashing water in his painted face. She did little of that, and he paid no attention to it.

The sun had not yet set when the grim warrior and his child emerged on the eastern shore, their garments dripping, but caring nothing for that. The boat was drawn far enough up the bank to prevent its being swept away by the current, and then all stood side by side, and as if by common impulse, looked back at the shore they had left.

The smoke from the burning Fort Wintermoot still rested on the calm surface of the river, and

filtered among the green vegetation near the scene of the battle. Other buildings had been fired, and mingled their vapor with it.

Here and there, every minute or two, sounded the sharp crack of a rifle. This too often meant that some fugitive had been run down by his cruel pursuer, who listened to no pleadings for mercy. A good many had taken refuge on Monacacy Island, from which the reports of guns continually came.

I have not the space here to tell you of the wonderful escapes at Wyoming, the particulars of which I have given in another work. One boy, who was with several men near Fort Jenkins before the battle, saw all the men shot down or captured; but he hid himself among some willows and was not noticed.

If you ever visit the scene of the battle, you will notice a broad, flat stone, called Queen Esther's Rock, a half-dozen miles below Wilkesbarre. Queen Esther was an old, cruel, half-breed woman who came with the Indians. She is sometimes known as Katharine Montour. A son of hers was killed in the conflict, and she was so angered that she had sixteen captives placed around the rock,

and meant to slay them all, while the warriors prevented them from escaping.

Nevertheless two of the young men jumped up and started on a run for the river. The guards dashed after them. One caught his toe, and rolled headlong down the bank into some bushes. Instead of springing up again, as he first started to do, he lay still, and though the Indians almost stepped upon him, he was not discovered, and got off without harm.

The other reached the river, took a running leap and dived, and swam under water as far as he could. When he came up to breathe, the waiting red men fired at him again and again. He was wounded, but not badly, and, reaching the other side, caught a stray horse, made a bridle from a hickory withe, and soon joined his friend.

Another fugitive, after running until he was so tired out that he could hardly stand, and hearing the Indians near, backed into a hollow log and awaited his fate. He had been in the hollow but a few minutes when a spider spun its web across the entrance. A few minutes later, two warriors sat down on the log. They noticed how good a hiding place it would be for the white man, and one

of them leaned over to peep in. As he did so, he saw the spider-web. He was sure that it would not be there if the man was inside, and did not search further. When the warriors left, the man crawled out and got safely away.

You know that the home of the Ripleys was on the eastern shore, which they left that same morning. They had crossed over in a large flatboat with a number of other families, so that now they were near their own home again. Omas had guided the canoe, too, so they landed not far from the little structure.

"Omas," said the mother, "I understand you wish us to go to the Delaware."

"Yes," he replied, "Iroquois won't hurt you there—must go."

"We haven't a particle of food with us; Ben has his gun and may have a chance to shoot some game on the way—more than likely, he will have no chance at all; it will take us several days to reach Stroudsburg, which I believe, is the nearest point. Don't you think it best that we should stop at the house and get what food we can?"

"Yes, we do dat; come 'long; not great time."

There could be no safer guide than the Delaware,

when his race were such complete masters of the situation; though there was risk that a patriot hiding somewhere in the neighborhood might take a shot at him, under the belief that he meant harm to the captives.

The humble log structure was found just as it was left that morning. If any of the marauding bands of Indians paid it a visit, they did not linger after seeing it was tenantless.

There was a whole loaf of bread and part of another left, beside some cooked chicken, and a number of live ones were scratching the ground outside, as if they had no concern in what was going on.

"The weather is warm now," remarked the prudent housewife, "but a cold storm may set in before we reach shelter."

With which she folded a blanket from her bed and laid it over her arm.

"It will come handy to sleep on," added Ben, who did the same with a second, despite the weight of his rifle, which (as they were made in those days) was a good load of itself for a strong boy.

Omas showed some impatience, though his companions did not understand the cause. His ac-

tions, indeed, were curious. They supposed he meant to conduct them all or a greater part of the way to Stroudsburg, though at times he appeared to be hesitating over it, or over some other scheme he had in mind.

Ben Ripley had rambled among the rugged scenery on the eastern shore of the river, having gone with his father many times when he was on hunting excursions; but he was not as familiar with the ins-and-outs of the mountains as the Delaware, whose village was a good many miles away.

None of the party had eaten anything of account since the early morning meal, before they crossed the Susquehanna. The dangers, excitement, and suspense of the hours drove away the thought of food. Young as was Linna, she had already learned not to ask for it when either of her parents chose not to offer it to her. Doubtless she was hungry, but if so, no one else knew it. Alice had been given bread when at Forty Fort, and she now suggested that some more would not come amiss.

“We all need it,” said Ben; “why not take our last meal in our old home? You have no objection, Omas?”

"Eat here," was his reply.

The guns were leaned against the walls, the blankets put aside and all gathered round the board. The Delaware had done the same before when visiting the family, and acquired the civilized form of eating, while Linna picked it up during the brief time spent with her friends.

The meal lasted but a few minutes, when they once more gathered up their luggage, as it may be called, left the house, and with Omas in the lead, struck into the mountains on the long tramp to the Delaware.

The sun went down while they were picking their way through the rough section. The Ripleys expected to do much hard travelling, but their guide's knowledge of every turn enabled him to pick out paths which none ever suspected. Sometimes the climbing was abrupt, but all, even to Alice, were accustomed to that kind of work, and they kept up a steady gait, which must have placed many miles to the rear if continued long.

Omas continued at the head. Directly behind him walked his child, the path most of the time being so narrow that they were obliged to travel in Indian file. Then came Alice and her mother,

while Ben considered himself the rear-guard. When the space allowed, Alice took the hand of her parent, but Linna never presumed to speak to or interfere with her grim, silent parent.

Darkness closed around them before they had gone a couple of miles. During all this time the tramp continued in silence, probably less than a dozen words being spoken in all. Each of the three elder was using eyes and ears to the utmost. The sharp crack of a rifle broke the silence, not more than a hundred yards to the right of them. Everyone started except Omas, who acted as if he did not hear the report. He made no change in his pace, and so far as the others could see in the gloom, did not turn his head. They concluded, therefore, that no cause for alarm existed.

Fairly through the mountain spur and among the deep woods, the journey was pushed until the night was well along. Suddenly, Omas made a short turn to the right and stopping in a hollow, where there were several large boulders, he said—

“We stay here all night.”

The words were a surprise, for it was expected he would travel for a long time. He, Mrs. Ripley, and Linna could have done so without incon-

venience, but Alice was tired out. Her relatives were pretty well burdened already, though either would have carried her had it been necessary; but the party had gained so good a start that there seemed little risk in making a long stop.

Omas reached down one hand and laid it on the bare head of Alice, saying in a voice of strange gentleness—

“Little girl tired—she can rest.”

And then all knew he had ceased walking because of her. Had she not been a member of the party, he would have kept the rest on their feet until the sun appeared above the forest.

“Yes, I’m tired, Omas,” said the little one wearily, holding the hand of the Delaware in both her own; “I’m glad you stopped.”

The gloom was so deep, for there was no moon until very late (and if there had been, its rays could not have pierced the dense foliage), that they could hardly see each other’s figures. Omas hastily gathered some leaves and dead twigs, which were heaped together against one of the boulders. Then he produced his flint and steel—for he had learned the trick long before of the whites—and by-and-by a shower of sparks was flying from

the swift, sharp blows of the metal against the hard stone. A minute later one of the sparks "caught," and under his nursing a fire was speedily under way.

While he was thus engaged, Mrs. Ripley spread the blankets on the ground and Alice stretched her tired little body upon one of them.

"Mamma, I guess God will excuse me for not saying my prayers," she murmured, as she closed her eyes and sank into slumber.

Linna was tired, too, but she kept her feet and looked at her father for his permission, before presuming to lie down.

"Come, Linna, here is your place beside Alice," said the mother kindly.

Again she turned to her father, who was standing by the fire, looking off in the gloom as if he suspected something wrong.

He gave the permission in their native tongue and she cuddled down beside her friend without further waiting.

"Mother," said Ben, "you had better lie down with them."

"Not yet," she replied, with a significant look at the Delaware, whose back was toward them.

"What about him?" asked the surprised lad in a low voice.

"He is meditating something evil: he wants to leave us."

"What evil is there in that, if he thinks we have gone far enough to be safe?"

"You have forgotten that he fought with the Iroquois to-day; he wants to go back to Wyoming and join them in their work."

"If that is so, how can we hinder him?"

"I don't know that we can; but I shall try it."

Ben busied himself gathering more wood, so that the fire cast a glow several yards from where it burned against the boulder.

When he had collected enough to last a long while, he came back and sat down by his mother. All this time the Delaware remained motionless; with his face away from them. He was debating some troublous question on his mind. They watched him closely.

He turned about abruptly, and said—

"Omas must go—he say 'good-night' to his friends."

CHAPTER VI

PUSHING EASTWARD

No person in all the world is so quick to detect deception as a mother. It is simply wonderful the way she will sometimes read one's inmost thoughts. I am sure you boys who have lagged on the road when sent on an errand, had a scrimmage with some other boy, or done any one of the numerous acts in which a mother persists in asking annoying questions, will agree with me.

While Omas, the Delaware warrior, stood with his face turned away from the camp fire and looking off in the gloom, as if he was trying to discover something in the darkness, Mrs. Ripley was sure she knew what the trouble was; he was trying to decide whether he should stay longer with the little party or leave them to make the rest of their way through the woods without him.

He might well say they were now so far from Wyoming that they were in little danger. They

had but to keep on tramping for several days and nights, and they would reach the little town of Stroudsburg, which, you may know, is near Delaware Water Gap. There they need have no fear of the red men.

Mrs. Ripley knew all this as well as Omas himself, but she did not wish him to go back and join the hostile Iroquois, as he wanted to do. She felt it would be far better if he would stay with them, for then he would do no further harm to the white people.

When, therefore, he turned about and bade them good-bye, all doubt was gone. Ben did not reply, but his mother rose from the other blanket on which she had been sitting, walked quietly to where the Delaware was standing, and laid her hand kindly on his arm.

"Omas, I do not wish you to leave us," she said.

He looked at her, for both stood where the fire-light fell upon their faces, and replied—

"No danger—walk towards the rising sun—need not walk fast—Iroquois won't hurt—soon be safe."

The lady was too wise to let her real objection appear.

"A while ago we heard the noise of a gun; our people are fleeing through the woods, and the red men are following them. Alice is tired, and we have stopped to rest. When we start again to-morrow, some of the red men will be ahead of us. What shall we do without our friend Omas?"

"He have gun," he replied, indicating Ben.

"So have the red men, and there are more of them."

Now if Mrs. Ripley was skillful in reading the thoughts of the Delaware, it may be that he too, suspected the real cause for her objections. Be that as it may, it was plain he was not satisfied. He held the Ripley family in too high regard to offend them openly; but Omas was set in his ways.

He made no reply to the last remark, but stepped a little nearer the fire and sat down, moody and silent.

"You have said enough, mother," remarked Ben in a low voice; "it will anger him to say more. I will sit with my head against the rock; do you lie down on the blankets and let your head rest in my lap. I think it will be safe for us all."

With some hesitation the mother complied, the Delaware apparently paying no heed to them. He kept his seat on the ground, looking gloomily into the fire and in deep thought. A struggle was going on in his mind, and no one could say whether the good or evil would win.

Ben Ripley was anxious that his mother should sleep. She had undergone the severest of trials since early morning, and none had wrought harder than she. The morrow would make further demands on her strength. As for himself, he was young, sturdy, and could stand more and rally sooner than she.

When, therefore, she said something in a low tone, he placed his hand softly over her mouth and whispered—

“Sh——! go to sleep, baby.”

He smoothed the silky hair away from the forehead so gently and so soothingly that she could not resist the effect. She meant to keep awake until Omas made his final decision; but no person can resist the approach of slumber, except by active movement.

Before long, and while Ben's hand was still

gliding like down over the forehead, the faint, regular breathing showed she was asleep.

The son smiled.

"Good! The best mother that ever lived! Heavenly Father, watch over her and spare her for many years. Watch over us all."

He looked across at Omas, on the other side of the camp fire, and saw the Delaware gazing fixedly at him.

He arose as silently as a shadow and stepped nearer, peering down on the pale, handsome face with its closed eyes.

"She 'sleep?" asked the Indian.

"Yes," replied Ben, softly, with a nod of his head.

He looked at her a moment and then across to the other blanket, where the round, chubby cheeks of the little girls reflected the firelight. He waited a moment, and then the gentler side of his nature triumphed. He bent over the forms, kissed each in turn, straightened up, and pointing to the eastward, said to Ben—

"Go dat way—you safe -good-bye."

"Good-bye," replied the lad, knowing it was useless to protest.

Like the gliding of the shadow of a cloud, the Delaware passed beyond the circle of light thrown out by the fire into the deep gloom of the wood. The moccasins pressed the dry leaves without giving back any sound, and he vanished.

"That makes a change of situation," was the conclusion of Ben Ripley, "he's gone, and I become the general of this army; there's no telling what danger may be abroad to-night, so I will keep my eyes open till sunrise, to make sure that no harm comes to these folks."

And ten minutes after this decision the lad was as sound asleep as his mother and the two little ones.

But there was One who did not slumber while all were unconscious. He ever watches over His children, and, though there were many perils abroad that night, none of them came near our friends.

The camp fire which had been burning so brightly grew dimmer and lower until the figures could hardly be seen. They gradually became more indistinct, and finally the gloom was as deep as anywhere in the dense woods. Only a few smoldering embers were left and they gave out no glow.

Ben was still sleeping, when something tickled his nose. He rubbed it vigorously with his forefinger and opened his eyes, confused and bewildered.

An odd, chuckling laugh at his elbow drew his gaze thither. There stood Linna, with the sprig of oak which she had been passing back and forth under the base of his nose, making it feel for all the world like a fly titillating his nostrils.

Ben made no attempt to catch the mischievous girl, but she deftly eluded him, and laughed so heartily that the others awoke and looked wonderingly to learn what it all meant.

"I'll pay you for that!" exclaimed the lad, as his mother raised her head from his lap. Bounding to his feet, he darted after Linna; but she was so nimble, and dodged back and forth and from right to left so fast, that it took much effort to run her down.

Like all little girls, she was very "ticklish," and when he dallied with his fingers about her plump neck, she dropped to the ground and kicked and rolled over to get away from him. He let her up, and said with pretended gravity that he never

allowed any trifling with him without punishing the person therefor.

Linna did not seem to notice the absence of her father, and asked no questions. Ben told his mother how he went off after she fell asleep, and the good woman was saddened, for she was sure she understood it all.

The first thing done, after a few minutes' talk, was to kneel in prayer, Mrs. Ripley leading in a petition to Heaven that all might be preserved from harm and reach the distant settlement safely. She did not forget the absent Omas, or the hundreds of hapless people whom they had left behind, who were still in great danger.

It was Mrs. Ripley's custom always to offer prayer in the little household at the beginning of each day. Linna, who had gained a dim idea of what the touching act meant, bent on her knees beside Alice; and who shall say the petition which went up from her heart was not heard and remembered by Him who notices the fall of every sparrow?

And now came the serious business of the day. Many long miles of trackless forest lay before them and the delay caused all to feel the need of hurry.

Mrs. Ripley gave to each a moderate portion of the food brought with them, carefully preserving what was left, for they were sure to need that and much more before reaching the end of their journey. The day promised to be sultry like the preceding one, and each sadly missed the water with which to quench their thirst and splash upon their faces and hands.

"We shall come across some before long," said Ben hopefully when he and his mother had divided the luggage between them and set out toward the rising sun; "we are a great deal better off than the poor folks at Wyoming."

The mother pinched the clothing of Linna, and found it dried of the moisture gained by her swim in the Susquehanna.

It is a curious practice among not only the Indians, but with many white people, not to change wet stockings or garments for dry ones. I knew a fisherman's boy whose father once punished him for removing his saturated stockings and shoes for others.

"Always let them dry on you, and you won't catch cold," was his doctrine. "Keep moving if you can, but don't change 'em."

I don't believe in the practice; but be that as it may, the little Delaware girl showed no ill-effects from sleeping in the clothing that had been wet. As for her father, he would have been insulted at the mention of such a thing to him.

Ben's belief about finding water proved true. They had gone hadly a half mile from camp when they came upon a sparkling brook, cold and clear, and abundant enough to serve all. Having no vessels with them, they lay down and quaffed their fill. Then they bathed their faces and hands in the delicious fluid, and were much refreshed.

The expectation was that they would travel a good many miles before night again overtook them. The way while rough and broken in many places, was not hard, and all, even to the smaller children, were used to being on their feet. There was little fear indeed that Linna would not do her part as well as the older ones. Young as she was in years, he had been trained to hardship from the time she could walk. Not only that, but, like all her race, she had learned to bear suffering in silence and without sign of pain.

She would have to become very tired before her companions would know it.

By-and-by the ground was found to be rising, and in the course of an hour they gained an elevation which, having few trees, gave them an extended view of the surrounding country.

Looking back in the direction of Wyoming, the sky was seen to be soiled by the heavy smoke not only from the burned Fort Wintermoot, but from other buildings that had been fired by the Tories and Indians. The sight was a sorrowful one, and caused the mother and son some uneasiness. They seemed nearer to the scene of the conflict than they had supposed, and—since the people had been continually swimming the river, and taking flight in the woods for the same point that was the destination of the Ripleys— it was quite certain that some of the pursuers were not far off.

“We must make as little noise as we can,” said Ben when the party were about to start forward again; “for there can be no telling how close we are to Indians that are looking for us.”

I think it better for you to walk a little way in front,” suggested the mother, “so as to warn us in time.”

The plan is a good one. I will keep in sight of

you, and the minute I see anything amiss, will make a sign, so you can stop at once."

This course was adopted. Ben carried one of the blankets flung over his left arm as if it were an extra garment, and steadied the heavy rifle on his shoulder with the other. As you remember, he was tall for his years, strong, and with rugged health.

Had the weather been cooler he could have kept up this method of traveling for hours without fatigue; but the heat made it trying. True, at that season of the year the foliage was dense on the trees and shut out the sun's rays, except in the open spaces and natural clearings which they now and then crossed but the vegetation also stopped whatever breeze was stirring, and obliged the members of the party to halt many times to rest and cool themselves.

Mrs. Ripley had but few extra things to carry, and showed less fatigue than anyone, excepting the Delaware child. The latter and Alice walked most of the time side by side, and generally with clasped hands. There was no use of their trying to keep their tongues still, but they were wise enough to speak in whispers and such soft undertones that

no one else could tell what they said, and therefore nothing was to be feared on that account from any enemies in the neighborhood.

"Why not *he* make sign?" was the startling question of Linna, pointing at Ben, before the party had gone far after their brief rest.

"What do you mean?" asked the puzzled Mrs. Ripley; "he isn't to make any sign to us till he sees or hears something wrong."

"People off dere!" replied Linna, pointing ahead and to the right of their course. "Me hear dem speak."

It was true. The keen ears of the child had discovered a peril that no one else suspected. She alone had caught the sound of voices that escaped all other ears.

CHAPTER VII

JABEZ ZITNER

At this moment Ben Ripley was about a hundred feet in advance of the party and ascending a ridge in the woods, which were so open that he was in plain sight of the others.

Mrs. Ripley, on hearing the alarming words of the little Delaware girl, came to a stop. It seemed strange that Linna, should have caught the sounds noticed by no one else, and that, too, while she was whispering to her companion, Alice; but even at that tender age the inherited sharpness of hearing had been trained to a wonderfully fine degree.

Mrs. Ripley was too prudent to argue with her. It was not wise to take any chances. Above all, it was important that Ben should know the truth, for he was still walking away from them with no knowledge of their discovery.

“S——t”

The sibilant noise made by the mother's lips

crossed the space, and the listening lad halted and looked round. She did not speak, but beckoned him to come back. He obeyed at once.

"Linna says she heard voices a minute ago, over yonder," whispered Mrs. Ripley, as her son joined them.

"So me did," added Linna, in answer to the inquiring look of the lad.

"You have sharp ears, little one; but are you sure?"

"Me am," was the confident reply.

"Where were they?"

She again pointed out the direction.

"That must be looked into; wait till I come back, and——"

"S——h!" interrupted the mother.

All caught an indistinct murmur, which proved Linna was right.

"Me tell you—eh?" she said in a proud undertone, her black eyes sparkling with triumph.

"You are right; wait till I learn whether they are friends or enemies. I will not be gone long."

Leaving the anxious group clustered together, Ben faced in the direction of the sounds, which had

stopped, and were so faint when heard that he could not tell whether they belonged to friends or foes.

As nearly as he could find out the parties were just beyond the crest of the ridge, and, but for the warning of Linna, he would have run into the danger before knowing it.

With utmost care he went up the slope. He leaned forward and stepped more slowly, avoiding, so far as he could, making any noise on the leaves or against the bushes and limbs which he had to push aside to allow him to advance.

At the instant of reaching the highest point he heard the voices again, so close that he knew they were made by white people, who were in a clump of dense undergrowth. A faint wreath of smoke filtering through the branches overhead showed they had started a small fire, beside which they were probably sitting or reclining on the ground.

Now that he was certain they belonged to his own race, he had less fear. Still, they might prove unpleasant neighbors when they came to know one of the party was a daughter of Omas. Turning toward his friends, who were watching him, Ben

made a sign for them to stay where they were while he went forward.

He moved with the same care as before, but an unexpected accident spoiled everything. His foot caught in a wire-like vine, and he almost fell on his hands and knees. Aware that he had betrayed himself, he threw aside further caution, hurried down the slope, and called out in a guarded undertone—

“Helloa there, friends!”

“Who are you?” was the demand that instantly followed, and from the undergrowth, beside a small fire, two men suddenly rose upright, each with rifle in hand.

Ben recognized them. One was Jabez Zitner and the other Horace Burwink—both middle-aged, sturdy, and strong. They were neighbors, and had taken part in the engagement the day before, but escaping without harm, were now on their way to the settlements of the Upper Delaware.

A meeting of this kind would have been pleasing in the highest degree, for it added great strength to the party, but a misgiving came to the lad when he recognized Zitner. He was the man who, when partly intoxicated the previous afternoon,



"Who are you?" [see page 79].

had tried to take Linna from him and was vigorously shoved aside by her friend.

"Helloa, Ben! where did you come from?" asked Zitner, who was now entirely himself.

"Glad to see you," added Burwink, and the two extended their hands. "You gave us a great scare, for the woods are full of redskins."

"You startled me, too," replied Ben. "I am travelling with my mother and sister to Stroudsburg. I suppose you are aiming for the same place?"

"Yes—if we ever get there. What's become of that little sarpent you had with you yesterday?"

It was Zitner who asked the question. Ben's face flushed, for he did not like to hear Linna spoken of in that way.

"She is with us," he quietly replied.

"What are you going to do with her?"

"She is in our care and goes wherever we go."

"You seem mighty fond of the people who played the mischief with us yesterday."

"Jabez Zitner, I fought just as hard as you, and did all I could to driveback the Iroquois and Tories, but I don't fight little children six years old."

"Who's talking about fighting 'em?" demanded

Zitner angrily. "Their people didn't spare *our* women and children."

"They are savages, but you and I claim to be civilized."

"That's all well enough, but my motto is—fight fire with fire."

Burwink was listening to this sharp interchange of words, the meaning of which he caught. Wishing to make a friend of him, for Ben foresaw trouble, he asked—

"Am I not right, Mr. Burwink?"

"I should say—on general principles you are; but, after yesterday, I don't feel much love for any of the varmints. Who is this Injin gal that you are talking about?"

Ben was too wise to give the name of Linna's father, knowing he would be instantly recognized as one of the fiercest warriors that had taken part in the invasion and battle. He therefore replied—

"She is a girl named Linna; she is of the same age as our Alice, and was visiting her when we crossed the river to Forty Fort yesterday morning. We could do nothing but take her with us, and I will defend her with my life."

"You are talking big," remarked Zitner, with

a scornful look at the sturdy lad. "Who is the gal's father?"

"That makes no difference; but I will say he belongs to the Delaware tribe, most of whom are friends to our people."

"There were plenty of them with the Senecas and Oneidas yesterday, and they fought like wild cats, too. But why don't you bring your folks forward?" added Zitner, looking inquiringly around.

"I will do so. Wait a few minutes."

He strode back and over the top of the ridge, until he caught sight of the frightened group.

"Come on!" he called, beckoning to them. "Mr. Zitner and Burwink are here, and want to see you."

With an expression of thankfulness, Mrs. Ripley, clasping a hand each of the children, walked up the slope, and passed over to where the couple awaited their approach by the camp fire. She shook hands with each, and expressed her pleasure at meeting them. They did the same toward her, and then all, with the exception of the children, seated themselves on the fallen trees beside which the small fire was burning.

Mrs. Ripley had observed the little incident the

preceding afternoon, when Zitner tried to stop Linna. She was ill at ease, for she noticed how sharply he looked at the child. She hoped, however, that now he was fully himself, he would be ashamed of his action, or at least make no reference to it.

No fear of her doing so. She showed her tact, by leading the conversation in another direction.

"When did you leave Wyoming?"

Burwink and I didn't get a chance to swim over until nearly midnight, and then we had a rough time of it. There were plenty of others that tried to do the same and never got to this side."

"It is a sad day for our homes and our people."

"When did you leave?" asked Burwink of the lady.

"We crossed before it was dark."

"How did you manage it? Swim?"

"No; we came over in a canoe. A Delaware Indian, the father of Linna, swam behind the boat and pushed it across. But for him, we never could have gotten away."

Mrs. Ripley, like her son, meant to keep the name of their friend from these men. There was no danger of either her or Ben telling it; but

neither thought of another means they had of learning it.

At this point, Alice went to her mother and leaned against her knees, with her gaze on the faces of the men. She had been standing beside Linna, whose eyes were never once removed from the displeasing countenance of Zitner.

She must have noticed the incident referred to, for the expression of her round face was of dislike and distrust. She stood further off from the men than anyone else—silent, watchful and suspicious.

Zitner now looked at her.

"Come here," he said coaxingly, extending his hand.

"No; me won't. Me don't like you," she replied, with an angry flirt and backward step.

"Jingo!" exclaimed the surprised Zitner, "I didn't think she could talk our lingo. Say, Miss Spitfire, what is your father's name?"

Before either Mr. Ripley or her son could interpose, Linna answered defiantly—

"He Omas—great warrior—kill good many white people—kill *you*!"

The reply caused consternation on the part of Mrs. Ripley and Ben, but the boy shut his lips

tight. He could not but admire the bravery of the child, and he was determined to stand by her to the end.

The mother was in despair, but she relied mainly on persuasion and prayer.

With no idea of what all this meant, Alice looked in the face of each person in turn while speaking.

"She's a chip of the old block," said Burwink, with a laugh. "She doesn't seem to have much fear of you, Jabez."

"I am hopeful she will feel different when she grows older," soothingly remarked Mrs. Ripley.

"I'd like to know what you build your hope on," replied Zitner, still curiously watching the child.

"I expect to have her a good deal under my care, and I shall do all I can to instruct her aright. This morning she knelt with us in prayer. You must remember that she is very young, and had heard little, if anything, of Christianity."

Zitner shook his head.

"It's born in 'em, and you can't get it out."

"But, Mr. Zitner, you will not deny that we have a good many Christian Indians. There are

plenty of them at Gnadenhutten, and the Moravian missionaries have been the means of turning hundreds from darkness to light. If they can do that with full-grown warriors and women, may we not hope for the best from those of tender years?"

"I don't know about that," was the dogged reply. "I never believed in this conversion business."

"What can you mean by such a remark?" asked the shocked lady.

I mean, religion is good enough for white people, but don't work with Injins. They will pretend they're good, but are only waiting for a chance to do mischief."

"The converted Delawares have never taken part in the wars against us. You know that as well as I. "

"How about Omas?"

"He makes no pretense of Christianity."

"And therefore has no claim on our indulgence."

"No one has said he has," observed Ben, coming to his mother's help; "he will never ask quarter from you or any white man."

"Where is he now? He brought you over the river, but seems to have deserted you."

"He left because he didn't think we had further need of his aid; we can get along without him."

"Now, see here," added Zitner, straightening up on the log and slapping his knee: "I'll tell you what I've made up my mind to do. I am willing to give in to Mrs. Riply that far, that I won't harm that youngster—that is, I will leave it to her father whether I shall or shan't."

Neither mother nor son could understand the meaning of this strange remark. They waited for the man to explain.

"I'm going to take her with us as a hostage. We're not clear of the varmints yet. I believe Omas himself ain't far off, and the rest will be on our heels all the way to Stroudsburg. If they get us in a tight place, I'll let 'em know we've got the gal of Omas with us, and if they harm a hair of our heads it'll be all up with her. We'll take her clean to Stroudsburg, and then turn her loose, for we won't have any further need of her; but she must go with us."

"Jabez Zitner," said Ben Ripley—"the moment you lay your hand on that child I will shoot you!"

CHAPTER VIII

LINNA'S WOODCRAFT

No one could have looked into the face of Ben Ripley without seeing he meant just what he said.

Jabez Zitner supposed, when he made known that he intended to take the little Deleware girl with him as a hostage, that though it might be displeasing to the Ripleys, they would not dare object; but he was mistaken.

The lad was sitting farthest away on the fallen tree, with his rifle resting across his knees, when he warned the man that if he laid a hand on Linna he would shoot him.

Ben spoke low, but mingling with his words were two faint clicking sounds. They were made by the hammer of his rifle, as with his thumb he drew it back ready for use. His face was slightly pale, but his eyes glittered, and he rose to his feet and looked at the startled man.

Mrs. Ripley gave a gasp of fright and clasped her hands, while the children mutely stared.

Even Zitner was silent. He knew Ben's pluck, but did not believe it would take him thus far, for it looked as if there were two adults against a single boy.

Burwink, however, was more of a man than his companion. He looked smilingly at Ben and said—

"Jabez, I reckon this has gone far enough."

"What do you mean?" angrily asked the other.

"You must leave the little gal alone."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" exclaimed Mrs. Ripley. "I might have known you would see that right is done."

Zitner had a few sharp words with his friend, but the latter was immovable. He would not listen to his proposition, and that ended the matter.

"Well," finally said Zitner, rising to his feet, "I intended to see you folks safe to the Delaware; but I won't have anything to do with you now. Come, Horace."

He strode off without another word or looking to the right or left. Burwink waited a minute, and

then, with a quizzical look at Mrs. Ripley and her son, asked—

“Do you think you can stand it?”

“We shall have to,” replied Ben.

“Well, good-bye and good luck to you”; and he followed his friend among the trees.

“That was a luckier ending than I expected,” remarked Ben, letting down the hammer of his rifle.

“If Mr. Burwink had sided with him, there would have been no help for it,” said his mother.

“Such people are always cowards. I wasn’t afraid of him.”

Now that they had departed, Linna came over to her champion—though she could not have fully understood all that had passed—and placed her hand confidently on his shoulder.

“Linna, I have two sisters,” he said tenderly; “yonder is one, and her name is Alice: can you tell me the name of the other?”

“Yes—she name be Linna.”

“You are right. Now, if you will kiss me, I won’t tickle you any more for making my nose itch this morning.”

The lips were put up to his, and with deep

affection on the part of both, the salute was exchanged.

"If any more white people show themselves, and they ask you your father's name, let mother and me answer for you."

"Me do what you say," was the obedient response.

It need not be said that our friends were greatly relieved by the departure of Zitner. While, as I have already said, they ought to have been glad of the company of him and Burwink, they would have been ill at ease so long as the surly fellow was with them. He surely held no goodwill toward the little girl, and would have found some chance to show it.

"But are we really rid of him?" asked Ben of his mother.

The two sat close to each other on the tree, and the children were playing a few steps away.

"I am quite sure we are."

"He may steal back to-night if we camp near."

"Why should he? He does not want to harm Linna, but to use her as a means of safety against her own people."

"That was what he said, but I don't believe

him. It seems to me we ought to change our course, to be certain of not meeting him again."

"As you think best."

"We have had a good rest. Come, girls, we must be off."

Taking the lead as before, Ben strode down the incline, bearing more to the left than he had been doing.

All smiled at Linna, for she noticed the change on the instant.

"You go wrong," she said; "dat not right way."

"Which is the right way, Miss Smartness?"

She pointed it out.

"You are right, but that is the course of that bad man, who doesn't like you. We will go around, so as not to see him again."

She was satisfied, and gave her attention to Alice, who thought it odd that she and Ben should have so many disputes.

Over the varying surface, turning aside now and then to pass some obstacle in the shape of rocks or ravines—now up hill and down, among the dense trees, where the briars and bushes scratched their hands and faces, across small rippling streams and natural clearings—they pushed on until the sun

was far beyond meridian and the halt and rest were grateful.

"I don't think we need give any more thought to Zitner," said Ben; "and I am sure we are all glad. He could not find us now, if he tried."

"If they kept to their course, we must be several miles apart."

"I have been working my way back, so that after all, I do not think we have lost much ground. I hope Miss Linna is satisfied."

"She would make complaint if she was not."

They had stopped near another of the small running streams, for it was harder to do without water than food.

"I'm hungry, mother."

"So are we all," she added, producing half a loaf, which was the last of their food.

"To leave any portion of this will only aggravate all your appetites, so we will finish it."

The bread was divided among the four, and when eating ceased not a crumb was left.

"It isn't a good time of the year for hunting, mother, but if I can get sight of any game, I'll bring it down, whether it is a deer, bear, wild

turkey, quail, or anything that will serve for a good meal."

"It isn't a time to be particular—in watching for danger look also for game."

"That's what I have been doing for the last few hours."

With the passage of time and the increase of the distance between them and Wyoming the hopes of the little party naturally rose. They were now a good many miles from their old home, and as yet had not seen a single red man. That numbers were abroad there could be no doubt, although it is a fact that a great many people did not start eastward until several days after the battle.

But it was a long, long way to the Delaware, with the travelling such as they had to face. I have spoken of the forest as being trackless, and a wrong impression may have been given. An old trail led from the Susquehanna to the Delaware, and was followed by many of the fugitives; but great risk was run by those who did so, for most of the pursuers used the same path. As a consequence, some were overtaken and slain.

Those who avoided the beaten route of necessity

suffered greater hardships; but none was equal to that of meeting their enemies. Omas took care to steer wide of this trail when leading the party into the wild section to the east of the river, and he showed them that he wished them to do the same. Ben was too wise to forget his wishes.

The location of the sun in the sky, the appearance of the bark and moss, and the tops of certain trees, enabled the young woodman to keep a pretty true course. He remarked, with a laugh, that if there was no likelihood of going wrong, Linna would correct him.

The afternoon was well past before they came upon any more water, and, with the warm weather and their long tramp, all suffered from thirst. They were not traversing a desert country, however, and soon found what they wanted in abundance.

"But," said Ben, "I am worried about food, mother. It is nearly night, and we haven't a mouthful. I suppose if there was plenty I wouldn't feel half as bad, but it seems to me I was never so hungry in all my life."

"That is natural; but, if necessary, we can go all night without anything to eat."

"If necessary, of course we can, but I dread it. Alice and Linna will suffer, though I'm not so sure about Linna. I would give almost anything for a wild turkey.

The dusky child looked up from where she was sitting on the ground, playing with Alice.

"Want turkey—eh?" she asked.

"Yes; have you any to sell?"

"Me get you one."

Mother and son stared in amazement. They could not believe she was in earnest. She saw it and, with a grin, added—

"Omas showed Linna how get turkey."

"What can she be driving at?" asked the puzzled Ben.

"She surely would not say what she does without reason. Linna, teach Ben how to get a wild turkey; we want one for supper, for if we don't have it, we shall all have to go without food."

"Me hungry," she ventured; "so be Alice—so be you."

"You are right. Come sister, show me how to catch a turkey."

She gravely rose from the ground. Her face appeared serious, but those who looked at her

closely detected a sparkle of the black eyes, for all the world as if she meditated some prank upon her confiding friends. Ben was suspicious. She added—

“Go wid me—me show you.” Then he was sure she was up to something.

He rose from where he was sitting, and, rifle in hand, walked a little way in the wood. She looked round once or twice, and continued advancing a few minutes after they were out of sight of Alice and her mother.

She held the hand of the youth, who acted as if he was a bad boy being led to punishment. He started to ask a question, but she checked him by raising her forefinger and a “S——h!” and he did not presume again.

Finally, she stopped among a number of trees where several trunks were two or three feet in diameter. Stepping behind one, she motioned him to do the same with another a few yards off.

Surveying him a moment, as if to make sure he was doing right, she suddenly emitted a sound from between her lips, which caused Ben Ripley to utter the exclamation under his breath—

"Well, by gracious! It that doesn't beat everything!"

The call made by Linna was the exact imitation of a wild turkey when lost in the woods. Perhaps you may know that the body of every one of those birds contains a bone which a hunter can so use as to make the same signal; but it is hard to produce the sound without such help, though it has been done.

Linna had succeeded to perfection.

"Who would have thought it possible for one so young as she to learn the trick?" Ben asked himself. "I have tried it many a time without the bone but never could do it."

He looked at her admiringly, and was certain she was the smartest girl he had ever seen.

"If there are any turkeys within hearing, that is bound to fetch them, but I have seen no signs of them."

Linna continued the signalling at intervals for fifteen minutes or more, peeping meanwhile from behind the tree and around her in every direction. Ben did the same, and saw nothing.

"Why don't shoot?" she abruptly asked.

He noted the direction of her gaze, and there, not

fifty feet away, was a big hen-turkey, walking slowly over the leaves, with head aloft and glancing here and there for the lost one.

The target was a good one, and taking careful aim, Ben toppled it fluttering to the ground at the first fire.

"Dat all want?" queried Linna.

"Yes; that will do for to-night, Linna."

"Den go back—play wid Alice."

And off she ran to rejoin her companion, while the delighted lad picked up his prize and brought it to camp.

Turning that and his knife over to his mother, he made a fire ready to pass the night, full of thankfulness that all had gone so well. Ben agreed to stand watch until near midnight, and then allow his mother to help him at the necessary duty.

While the simple preparations were going on, Linna knelt on the bare ground with her ear pressed to the earth. Almost instantly she raised her head and whispered:

"Somebody comin' dis way—guess be Injins!"

CHAPTER IX

IN A CIRCLE

This was alarming news. Ben Ripley imitated the action of Linna. Kneeling down, he pressed his ear to the earth.

Yes; he heard faint footfalls. Persons were moving about not far away.

"She is right," he said in a low tone; "likely they are Indians, though we cannot be certain."

"It won't do to wait till they come to us," remarked his mother.

"Shall I put out the fire?" asked Ben, disconcerted by the suddenness of the danger.

"No, we can't spare the time. Let us leave. Come children."

She took the hand of each girl and walked quickly off, while Ben caught up the blankets and followed.

They had no particular point in view, but wished to reach a safe place without delay.

The gloom of the gathering night helped them, and when they paused they were confident they had not been seen by anyone.

Without any thought on their part, they made their way to a mass of rocks and boulders, more extensive than any seen through the day. It was a hundred yards from their starting part.

They sat down for a whispered consultation.

"They must have heard the report of my rifle," said Ben.

"That was a considerable while ago, and they may have been a good way off at the time."

"Then, being so much nearer, it was the report which brought them. What would become of us but for Linna?" added Ben, placing his arm affectionately around her. "It was she that got us our supper, and now she warns us of danger."

They may be Zitner and Burwink."

"Not likely, but if they come to our fire we shall soon find out. Look!"

To their astonishment, the little fire they had left only a few minutes before burned up brightly, showing that a lot of fuel had been thrown on it.

Too many trees and too much undergrowth ob-

truded for them to detect anything more than the great increase in brightness.

"The darkness will prevent their following our footprints," whispered the mother.

"I will go a little nearer and find out what it means; it may be, after all, that they are friends."

"Be careful, my son."

"I will."

It was not a hard task Ben Ripley gave himself. He had not far to go, and he proceeded with so much caution that no risk was involved. Only half the distance was passed when he gained a full view of the camp-fire and its surroundings.

The sight was disquieting. Three Indian warriors were there. One had been gathering dry sticks which he flung on the blaze; another was helping himself to what was left of the cooked turkey; while the third bent low, moved slowly around the lit-up portion of the ground with his eyes fixed on it.

It was plain he was scrutinizing the footprints made by the party that had left just in time to escape them.

It was a fortunate discovery made by Linna!

With the aid of the bright glare, it could not

take him long to identify the little party as fugitives fleeing eastward, though it may be questioned whether they learned that it consisted of one large boy, an adult woman, and two small children.

They were in the battle yesterday. They have left the others to look after those in Wyoming, while they are hunting the poor creatures that have taken to the woods.

The Iroquois who had been studying the ground straightened himself up and said something to the others. One of them then flung more fuel on the flames, and he who was ravenously eating suspended his operations, but quickly resumed again, as if he liked his occupation better than anything else to which he could turn his attention.

Then the first stooped down and caught up a burning brand. Several quick circles over his head fanned it into a vigorous blaze. Holding it aloft, with his shoulders bent forward, he moved slowly towards Ben Ripley.

He was tracing the footprints by the aid of the torch!

"Gracious! he will be among us in a minute," was the terrifying thought of the lad, who turned

and ran back to his friends, in such haste that he was in danger of betraying his movements.

"Leave—quick!" he said; "they are after us!"

"No, they are not," replied his mother, who nevertheless stood ready to do as he said.

Ben looked back. The warrior with a torch, after walking a rod or so from the fire, had stopped, and was now in plain sight, with the flaming brand held above his head, while he peered out in the gloom in the direction of the fugitives, as if expecting to discern them.

Could he have known how near they were, he and his companions would have rushed down upon them; but they must have thought they had fled much further. It was impossible to trail them by torch-light as fast as they could travel, and the Indians did not waste time in the effort. The one with the torch went back to his companions.

The incident warned our friends of a new form of danger, which until then had not been counted among the probabilities.

The Indians, as you know, can trace a person through the woods with wonderful skill, seeing signs where the untrained eye observes nothing. If these three chose to wait where they were until

daylight, there was nothing to prevent their taking up the trail and tracing the fugitives wherever they went.

"It won't do to stay here," said Ben, "for they will be right upon us at daylight."

"Providing they wait where they are."

"Why should they not do so? They are looking for us."

Mrs. Ripley dared not answer the question as her heart prompted. At the same time, she could think of no means of throwing them off their track.

"It might have been better had we stayed with Zitner and Burwink—no, it would not have been," she corrected herself, "for they were unfriendly to Linna. But we must go."

The only hope that presented itself was that they might travel so far during the darkness that the Indians would not keep up the pursuit when the trail was revealed to them.

The moon did not rise until very late, and there being no path, while all were in total ignorance of the neighborhood, it will be understood that they had set to work to do a very hard, if not impossible thing.

Ben, as usual, took the lead, and, before he had gone twenty steps, was caught under the chin by a protruding limb that almost lifted him off his feet. Then he went headlong into a hollow and bruised himself against some stones. Still, he did not give up, and by-and-by the ground became more level and his mishaps less frequent.

Alice and Linna, like little heroines, never murmured. All persevered until it was agreed that they were at least two miles from the camp-fire.

In making this hard journey, every one of the party met with several narrow escapes, and it was agreed that it was best to go no further until daylight.

"As soon as we can see, we'll be off again, and ought to be able to travel as fast as they will do. Where they must watch all the time for our foot-prints, they cannot go off a walk."

"We may as well wait."

Throughout their haste, the blankets had been preserved. Indeed, the one over Ben's arm had served to break his fall more than once. These were placed on the ground, and the children lay down beside each other, quickly sinking to sleep;

but the others, though pretty well worn, were too anxious to rest yet awhile.

"I have no idea where we are," said the son; "but one place is as good as another at such a time, and the weather is so warm that the blankets are not needed. Now, mother, I wish you would lie down beside the children and rest. You need it badly, I know."

"And so do you, my son."

"Not for some time yet."

"But, if you intend to watch until daylight, you will be worn out by morning. Besides, you cannot stay awake unless you move about. I will agree to lie down if you will promise to call me when you think it is midnight, and let me take a turn."

"I will agree to call you when I feel the need of you, and I will pace the ground like a sentinel on duty."

The mother was forced to accept this proposition and after some more cautious conversation, she did as her boy wished, and he was left alone.

Ben did not forget his slip of the night before. It was necessary that one of the company should maintain watch while the others slept, and only these two could do it. He meant to guard the

others through the short summer night, trusting to a chance of getting what slumber he needed on the morrow when the others were awake.

"I would like to catch myself waking her," he mused, after he had groped around until he found a space a couple of rods in length over which he could pace back and forth.

Then, with his rifle resting on his shoulder, he began his patient beat, surrounded by impenetrable gloom, and with the lives of three loved in his keeping.

By-and-by a lighting of the sky showed the moon had risen. This, however, was of little or no help, since the abundance of leaves prevented its rays piercing between and lighting up the ground beneath.

It would be hard to imagine a more gloomy occupation than that of Ben Ripley while engaged with this duty. The solemn murmur of the vast woods around him, the world of darkness in which he slowly paced to and fro, the memory of the sad scenes he had seen in the lovely Wyoming Valley, the certainty that a good many miles must yet be traversed before they could sit down in safety, the consciousness that several of the cruel red men were

near them, and the belief that they would start in pursuit as soon as it was light—all this oppressed him with crushing weight, and made him feel at times as if there was no escape for him and his loved ones.

“There is only one way of hiding our trail,” he mused. “If we could come upon some river or large stream of water, where there was a boat, or we could make a raft, we should be safe. A big rainstorm would do as well, for it would wash out all signs of our footprints.”

He paused in his walk and peeped up at a speck of sky shown through a rift among the limbs.

“There is hardly a cloud; it looks as if it wouldn’t rain for a week, and I don’t know of any river between here and the Delaware.”

His senses were never more alert. He avoided the fatal mistake of sitting down for a few minutes or so much as leaning against a tree to rest. He stopped, however, now and then and listened intently.

“I wonder whether I am mistaken, or whether I did hear something moving over the leaves out there?”

The fact was that the almost inaudible rustling

was noticed only when he himself was in motion inclined him to suspect it was a delusion, accounted for by his tense nerves.

But after a time he became certain of a fact hardly less startling in its nature.

When walking back and forth with his face away from the spot where his friends lay, something gleamed a short distance off among the trees. Its location showed it was on the ground, and, as nearly as he could judge, less than a hundred feet off.

His first supposition was that it was a fungus growth known in the country as "fox-fire," which gives out a phosphorescent glow in the darkness; but after watching and studying it for a long time, he was convinced it was something else.

"I'm going to find out," he decided; "it won't take me long, and I ought to know all about it, for it may concern us."

Stealing forward, he was not a little astonished to find a real fire, sunken to a glowing ember, left by someone.

"It must be as Zitner said—the wood are full of Indians, and some of them have camped there."

Not wishing to stumble over any of their bodies,

he manoeuvred until assured that whoever kindled the fire had left, when he kicked aside the ashes.

The act caused a twist of flame to spring up and throw out a tiny glare, which illumined several feet of surrounding space.

And then the astonished youth made the discovery that this was the very spot where they had cooked their turkey hours before, and from which they had fled in hot haste before the approach of the three Iroquois.

He and his friends had traveled, in a circle and come back to their starting-point!

CHAPTER X

NEAR THE END

Anyone who is used to the woods knows how apt he is to wander in a circle unless he keeps his wits about him. There have been many causes named for this curious fact, and the one that strikes me as the most reasonable is that we are all either right or left-handed. It is rare that you meet a person who is ambidextrous—that is, who uses both hands equally well. When, therefore, he sets out to travel through the woods without any guide, he unconsciously exerts his right or left limb, as the case may be, more than the other, and this makes his course circular,

There are three “sign-boards” by which a hunter can keep trace of the points of the compass when in the woods, without noticing the sun, which of itself is often a great help. Three-fourths of the moss on trees grows on the north side; the heaviest boughs on spruce trees are always on the

south side, and the topmost twig of every unjured hemlock tree tips to the east.

Now, while these signs never err, you can see that it is almost impossible to turn them to account at night.

Ben Ripley had led his friends in an irregular circle, and brought them back to within a brief distance of the starting point. This was the camp-fire from which they fled in such panic before the approach of the three red men.

The discovery filled him with dismay, and he darted out in the darkness for the rocks where the others were sleeping. His first intention was to rouse them and plunge into the woods again, but a few minutes served to make him cooler and more collected in mind.

The night was well spent, and a flight of that kind could not do much for them. It might be all in vain. It would be trying to the last degree. He decided not to disturb the sleepers.

By-and-by he persuaded himself that matters were not as bad as they first appeared. Inasmuch as the fugitives had not returned over their own trail, the Indians, in case they took it in the morning must make the same circuit, and thus be

forced to go just as far as if the flight had been in a direct line.

It was a mystery, however, what had become of the three warriors. They could not be near the camp, or they would have appeared when the lad returned to it. They had left, but who could say whither they had gone?

While Ben was debating the painful question, a growing light in the direction of the Delaware told him the night was ended and the new day dawning.

The fourth day of July, the second anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, had passed. He thought of it, standing alone in the dismal forest with danger on every hand, and oppressed by the great fear that those whom he loved more than his own life must perish in that gloomy wilderness.

He did not dare however, to give way to his sad thoughts. At the first streakings of light among the trees, he roused his mother and told her the alarming truth.

"I do not understand it," she replied, alluding to the absence of the Iroquois; "it must be they are in the neighborhood."

The children were still sleeping quietly on the blanket. No food or water was at command, and they could not take the time to look for any. Indeed, the two elder ones felt no hunger or thirst.

The mother rose to her feet and looked around, her interest centering on the rock and boulders, which stretched away to the rear further than they could penetrate with the eye.

"I know they are skillful in following footprints," she remarked; "but if we walk carefully over those rocks, I think they will not be able to track us. We will try it."

The children were roused and quickly learned what was to be done, the mother adding that the prayer which she was accustomed to offer up every morning would be given when they reached a spot where it was safe to do so.

For fully a hundred yards the four were able to make their way without resting their feet on the ground. Then the boulders ended as abruptly as they began.

All now kneeled on the granite floor and asked Heaven to deliver them safely out of the dangers by which they were surrounded.

If the Indians chose to make search, after tracing

the little party to the stony place, they must eventually come upon the new trail, where it began again on the ground; but unless they struck it by accident, they must use a good deal of time in hunting for it.

"Come on," called Ben in a low voice, but with a renewal of hope; "we shall get somewhere one of these days."

To their surprise, not far from the rocks they came upon a faintly marked path among the trees.

"What is the meaning of that?" Ben asked, looking inquiringly at his mother and Linna.

"Men don't do dat—wild beasts," replied the dusky child.

"She is right," added the mother; "the animals follow it to water; let us do the same."

The haunting fear of the red men made the words between the fugitives few, and all their movements guarded. They kept glancing to right and left, in front and to the rear, Linna being probably the most active. It was as if she inherited from her parents their surprising woodcraft, and was now calling it into play for the benefit of her friends.

Suddenly something flickered in the path ahead,

and Ben stopped short, those behind him doing the same.

Just in advance—less than fifty yards, indeed—a beautiful fawn had come to a halt. Its graceful head, with its short soft brown eyes, was lifted high, and it looked wonderingly at the people, as if not knowing the meaning, and too innocent to feel fear.

Ben drew up his rifle, for it was tempting chance for a delicious breakfast. But almost instantly he lowered the weapon again.

The fawn was so trusting, so unsuspicious, that a feeling of pity came to the young hunter. The animal suggested his own little sister, for it was wandering through the unfriendly woods, with none to protect it from cruel enemies.

“Go,” whispered Ben; “I haven’t the heart to harm you; I will starve first.”

“Remember the result of the shot yesterday,” said his mother warningly. “We are in too much peril to increase it.”

The lad advanced along the path, and every one of the company smiled at the fawn, when it stood motionless, staring until they were almost to it. Then the timid creature turned nimbly and

trotted over the trail, its head so high, that as it turned from side to side, it saw everything done by the strange beings following.

Had the situation been less serious, Ben would have had some sport with the lovely creature, but he dared not give it much attention. It continued trotting a short way, and then sprang gracefully aside among the trees, leaving no scent on the leaves by which the most highly trained hound could trace it.

A little way beyond they came upon the largest stream seen since leaving the mountains east of the Susquehanna. It was a dozen feet in width, quite deep, rapid, and clear.

"Here is enough drink for us all," said Ben, and they proceeded to help themselves in the primitive fashion described elsewhere.

"That must contain fish," observed the mother; "but we are without the means of catching them."

"Unless Linna will jump in and haul them out for us. But if we are to continue our journey, we must find some way of getting to the other side; it is too deep and wide to ford or jump."

"It must be narrower in other places——"

"Oh! look mamma!"

It was Alice who first saw a terrifying sight. An immense black bear, the largest any of the party had ever seen, swung from among the trees and came to the water's edge on the other side.

He was so enormous that all started and recoiled a step, even Linna uttering an exclamation in her own tongue. Ben grasped his rifle and held it ready to use the instant it became necessary.

But Bruin was in a gracious mood that morning. He looked at the party with stupid curiosity, then reared on his hind legs, and swung his beam-like paws in an odd way.

He is inviting us to come over and be hugged to death," laughed Ben.

"He will come over and eat us all up," said Alice, clinging to the dress of her mother.

"No," replied the parent, soothingly patting her head; "Ben won't let him do that. Do not be frightened."

"Climb tree," suggested Linna; "not big tree 'cause bear climb dat, too—climb little tree, den he can't climb it."

"You are right, but we will wait and see what he does. I don't want to fire my gun unless I have

to, and if he will let us alone we won't hurt him. There! he is going to drink."

The huge creature bent his head down to the water and helped himself. When he had had enough, he raised his snout and again looked at the party, who were closely watching him.

This was the critical moment. If he meant to attack them he would plunge into the water and either swim or wade across. Ben raised the hammer of his rifle and awaited his action.

Had Bruin been hungry, he would not have dallied so long; but he did not seem to see anything specially tempting in the group, and lumbered off among the trees.

"A lucky move for you," remarked Ben.

"And just as lucky for us," added the mother; "for though you might have slain him, as I have no doubt you would, the report of the gun must have brought more dangerous enemies to us."

"I would give a good deal to know what has become of them. It begins to look as if they did not consider us worth bothering with."

"I wish I could think that, but I cannot. I think it more likely that they know where we are and are trifling with us, as a cat does with a mouse."

"That makes me anxious to push on. We must find some place where we can cross the stream. Let's go further up the bank."

He took the course named, leading away from the great bear with which they had so narrowly escaped an encounter.

To their surprise, they had not far to go before the spot they were seeking was found. The stream narrowed between some rocks, so much that even Alice could spring across without wetting her feet.

"I am afraid Linna can't leap it," remarked Ben with a smile.

"Me show you."

And, without recoiling a step, the nimble little one made a graceful bound, which landed her several feet beyond the other margin.

"Well done!" said Ben "I couldn't do much better myself. Now, Alice, you are not going to let her beat you?"

Alice was timid at first, but with a good start she cleared the space. She landed, however, so near the water that had not the watchful Linna caught one of the hands thrown up to save herself she would have fallen back in the stream.

Mother and son imitated them, and all stood on the other side of the obstruction without having suffered any inconvenience.

While they were congratulating themselves, a startling reminder of their danger came in the near report of a rifle. It was from the direction in which they had seen the bear, and in the stillness of the woods all heard a snarling growl, which proved that the beast had received his death wound.

"The Indians are there!" whispered the frightened Ben; "what shall we do, mother?"

"What *can* we do?" she asked, helpless and at her wits' end for the moment; "there seems to be no escaping them."

"Me go talk with them," was the amazing remark of the little Delaware girl.

"You talk with them!" repeated Mrs. Ripley; "what can you do?"

"Don't know—me try."

And without waiting for permission, Linna started on a light run toward the point whence came the report of the rifle that gave Bruin his death wound.

Mother and son looked in each other's face in

mute wonderment for a full minute after the departure of the girl.

"She's a remarkable child," finally said the mother; " she has done us more than one good turn, and, it may be, Heaven intends to make use of her again, though I cannot see how."

"The Iroquois will recognize her as one of their own race. Perhaps one or more of them belong to her tribe; they will know her as the child of Omas, and may listen to her pleadings."

"Alas! they will give little heed to them; my heart misgives me, son; I feel that the end is at hand."

Meanwhile, let us follow Linna, the Delaware, upon her strange mission.

CHAPTER XI

ALL IN VAIN

I am at some disadvantage in giving an account of the remarkable interview between the little Delaware girl, Linna, and the three hostile warriors who had trailed the Ripleys to the stream in the wilderness across which they had just leaped in the effort to continue their flight from Wyoming to the upper Delaware.

There were no witnesses to the interview except the parties named, but when Linna in after years had become a woman, with her very strong memory she gave a description of what passed, and it has come down through the descendants of the pioneers to the present day.

You will permit me to found my narrative upon her testimony, and to be quite liberal in the interpretation of what took place.

The fears of the fugitives were well founded. The three red men were near them for a long while

before they showed themselves. It was very much as Mrs. Ripley had said. They were so sure of the prize that they trifled with them.

Linna reached the spot where the warriors were standing directly after one of the number had sent a bullet through the bear. Young as she was, she understood the peril of her friends, and set out to do all she could for them.

She knew that Omas, her father, was a great warrior. He belonged to the Delaware tribe, which years before had been soundly beaten by the Iroquois and reduced almost to slavery; but among the conquered people were many without superiors in bravery, skill, and prowess. Omas was one of the most noted examples.

The first thrill of hope came to the young child when she recognized the one that had killed the bear. He was Red Wolf, a member of her own tribe, who often had been in her father's wigwam, and was therefore well known to his child. The others were of the Seneca tribe, one of those composing the Iroquois, or Six Nations, the most powerful confederation of Indians that ever existed on the American continent.

The three looked at the little girl in amazement,

as she came running between the trees. She dropped to a rapid walk, and did not stop until she was among them.

"Where do you come from?" asked Red Wolf, in the Delaware tongue.

"My father, the great Omas, brought me to see my friend Alice. He left me with her people, and you must not harm them."

"Why did Omas leave you with them?"

"They are my friends."

It should be said the Senecas, who calmly listened to the conversation, understood all that was said.

"Where are you going?"

"A long way through the wood."

"Why does Omas leave you with the pale-faces? You should be in your own wigwam many miles away."

"He knows I am safe with them. He led us through the woods until he could leave us; then he went back to the great river between the mountains to help the other warriors fight."

None of the three could doubt that the child was speaking the truth. They held the prowess of Omas in high respect; but they were not

the ones to surrender such a prize as was already theirs.

"We will take them back to Wyoming with us," said Red Wolf; "then Omas may do as he thinks best with them."

With a shrewdness far beyond her years, Linna said—

"He wants them to go to the other big river, off yonder"—pointing eastward. "Why do you wish to take them back to Wyoming?"

"If he wants them to go to the other big river, he can send them after he sees them again."

"You will make Omas angry; he will strike you down with his tomahawk," said Linna.

Although these words were the words of a child, they produced their effect. Red Wolf knew how deeply the grim warrior loved his only daughter, and he knew, too, how terrible was the wrath of the warrior.

Omas had chosen to spare this family from the cruelty visitied upon so many others. If Red Wolf dared to run the risk of rousing the vengeance of Omas, he must take the consequences. He shrank from doing so.

The Delaware beckoned to one of the Senecas,

and they stepped aside and talked a few minutes, in tones too low for the listening Linna to hear what was said. Subsequent events, however, made clear the meaning of their conversation.

Red Wolf proposed to spare the fugitives. He wished to go away with his companions and leave them to pursue their flight without molestation, so far as they were concerned.

But the Senecas held Omas in less dread than did Red Wolf. They were unwilling to let the whites escape. The third warrior, who joined them, was as strenuous as the first. While one might have shrunk from stirring the anger of the famous Delaware, the two together did not hesitate to run counter to his wishes. They refused to be dissuaded by Red Wolf.

They remained apart from the girl for ten minutes, earnestly conversing, while she could not overhear a word.

Finally, one of the three—a Seneca—turned about and walked away, as if impatient with the dispute. He took a course leading from the stream, and deeper into the woods.

Linna noticed the curious act, but, great as was her acumen for one of her years, she did not

suspect its meaning. It would have been passing strange had she done so, for the movement was meant to deceive her and bring the disputation to an end.

The couple remaining walked to where Linna awaited them. The Seneca turned aside and sauntered to the carcass of the bear, as if that had more interest just then for him.

"What will Omas do if my brother warriors take your friends back to the other river, but Red Wolf does not help?"

"He will strike them down with his tomahawk; my father, Omas, is a great warrior."

The black eyes flashed as the girl proudly uttered these words, and she looked defiantly in the painted face towering above her.

"But what will he do with Red Wolf?"

The reply to this question was worthy of Tecumseh, and, coming from the lips of so young a child, approached the marvelous:

"He will strike down Red Wolf, because he is a coward, and did not keep all harm from his white friends."

This intimation that the Delaware could not shelter himself behind the plea of neutrality, but

must be either an active friend or foe, was a little more than he could accept. While he held Omas in wholesome dread, he dared not array himself against the two Senecas, who were determined not to spare the hapless fugitives.

Red Wolf was a fair specimen of his tribe, who, as I have stated, were beaten by the Iroquois. These conquerors, indeed, carried matters with so high a hand that they once forbade the Delawares to use firearms, but made them keep to the old-fashioned bow and arrow.

Red Wolf, therefore, having squared accounts, so to speak, with his present companions, was anxious to win the good will of Linna, and thereby that of her fierce parent, who was a hurricane in his wrath, and likely to brain Red Wolf before he could explain matters.

"Omas is the greatest warrior of the Delawares," he said to Linna; "Red Wolf and he are brothers. But the Senecas will not listen to the words of Red Wolf; they love not Omas as does Red Wolf."

The Delaware child now found herself in a quandary. She had made her plea, but, so far as she could see, it was in vain, since the friendship of Red Wolf alone was not enough. One of the

Senecas was studying the body of the dead bear and paying no heed to her words; the other had gone off, she knew not where.

What remained for her to do?

While the little one was asking herself the question, and was trying to think what course she should follow, the absent Seneca was working out the mischievous plot he had formed, and which was fully known to his companions.

An uprooted tree lay extended on the ground, near where Mrs. Ripley and her children saw Linna run off to plead with the Indians. Since they could do nothing but wait, helpless and almost despairing, for the return of the child, they sat down on the prostrate trunk.

Ben was near the base, close to the mass of upturned roots, which spread out like an enormous fan, with its dirt and prong-like roots projecting in all directions. He was tired, depressed, and worn out. It will be remembered he had not slept a wink during the preceding night, or eaten a mouthful of food since then. Strong, sturdy, and lusty as he was, he could not help feeling the effects of all this.

He leaned his rifle against a huge, gnarled root,

within arm's length of where he half reclined, with his feet extended along the trunk. He had but to reach out his hand, without moving his body, to grasp the weapon whatever moment it might be needed.

Exhausted as he was, his condition was too nervous to permit slumber. His mother had said she thought the end was at hand, and he believed the same.

She was but a few feet away, sitting more erect on the tree, with Alice leaning against her.

The eyes of all were turned towards the point where Linna had vanished, and whence she was expected every minute to come into view again.

She was not far off. Once or twice the mother and son caught the sounds of their voices, though the exuberant vegetation shut them from sight.

"It was idle for her to go," said Ben; "and I cannot see any chance for her helping us."

"They will not harm her, nor will they be denied the pleasure of doing what they choose with us."

"Some persons might believe the delay was favorable, but I cannot think that way."

Neither felt like conversation. It was an effort to say anything; but mother and son, in their

unselfishness, pitied each other, and strove vainly to lift the gloomy thoughts that were oppressing both.

Had Ben Ripley seen the departure of the Seneca, he might have suspected its meaning; but, unaware of it, he never dreamed of the new form which the ever-present danger thus assumed.

The Seneca, after leaving Red Wolf and the other warrior, walked directly over the path leading away from the stream until well beyond the sight of those thus left behind. He looked back, and, seeing nothing of them, turned aside and moved off, until he arrived at a point beyond the group of three resting on the fallen tree.

Thus, as will be seen, the Ripleys were between the two and Linna on the one hand, and the single Seneca on the other. He knew the precise location of the fugitives as well as if they had been in his field of vision from the first.

He now began approaching them from the rear. Their faces were turned away from him, and everything favored his stealthy advance. The huge spread of dirt and roots made by the overturning of the big tree served as a screen, through even without this help he would probably have suc-

ceeded in his efforts to steal upon them unawares.

He stepped so carefully upon the dried leaves that no sound was made, and the most highly trained ear, therefore, would not have detected him.

If Ben had once risen from his reclining posture and looked around, if Mrs. Ripley had stood up and done the same, or if little Alice had indulged in her natural sportiveness, assuredly one of them would have observed the crouching warrior, gradually drawing closer, like the moving of a hand over the face of a clock; but none saw him.

Nearer and nearer he came, step by step, until at last he stood just on the other side of the mass of roots, and not ten feet from the boy.

With the same noiselessness, the crouching form bent over sideways and peered around the screen. Then the dusky arm glided forward until the iron fingers clasped the barrel of the rifle leaning against the root, and the weapon was withdrawn.

He now had two guns, and Ben Ripley none.

Then the Seneca advanced, a weapon in either hand, and, presenting himself in front of the amazed group, exclaimed—

"Huh— How do, broder?—how do, sister? "

Ben Ripley sprang up as if shot, and his startled mother, with a gasp of affright, turned her head.

For one moment the boy meditated leaping upon the warrior, in the desperate attempt to wrench his gun from his grasp; but the mother, reading his intention, interposed.

"Do nothing, my son; we are in the hands of Heaven."



"Ben Ripley sprang up as if shot" [see page 136]

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

The point, at last, had been reached where it was useless to struggle any longer.

The little party of fugitives, after safely crossing the Susquehanna on the day of the battle, and penetrating more than a score of miles on their way eastward to the Delaware, were overtaken and made captive by three Indian warriors.

Warning Ben against any resistance, the mother bowed her head in submission, and awaited her fate. Only once, when she clasped her arm around the awed and silent Alice, laying the other affectionately upon the shoulder of her brave son, did she speak—

“Murmur not at the will of Heaven.”

The Seneca was surprised at the action, or, rather, want of action, on the part of the captives. Receiving no response to his salutation, he stood

a moment in silence, and then emitted a tremulous whoop.

It was a signal for Red Wolf and the other Seneca. They understood it, and hurried to the spot, with Linna close behind them.

It would have been expected that she would indulge in some outburst when she saw how ill everything had gone; but, with one grieved look, she went up to the sorrowing, weeping mother, and buried her head between her knees.

And then she did what no one of that party had ever before seen her do—she sobbed with a breaking heart. The mother soothed her as best she could, passing her hand over her wealth of black hair, and uttering words which she heard not.

Ben Ripley, when the blow came, stood erect and folded his arms. His face was pale, but his lips were mute. Nor even by look did he ask for mercy from their captors.

In the midst of the impressive tableau, Linna suddenly raised her head from the lap of the mother, her action and attitude showing she had caught some sound which she recognized.

But everyone else in the party also noted it. It was a shrill, penetrating whistle, ringing among the forest arches—a call which she had heard many a time, and she could never mistake its meaning.

Her eyes sparkled through her tears, which wet her cheeks; but she forgot everything but that signal.

“Dat Omas!—dat Omas—dat fader!” she exclaimed, springing to her feet, trembling and aglow with excitement.

There was one among the three who, had his painted complexion permitted, would have turned ashy pale. Red Wolf was afraid that when the fearful Delaware warrior thundered down on them, he would not give his brother time to explain matters before sinking his tomahawk into his brain. Manifestly, therefore, but one course was open for him, and he took it without a second's delay.

He fled for life.

The Senecas, however, stood their ground. The signal of Omas sounded again, and Linna answered it. Her father was near at hand, and quickly came to view.

But, lo! he had a companion. It was To-wika, his faithful wife.

The reunion of the Delaware family was an extraordinary one. Had no others been present, Linna would have bounded into the arms of her mother been pressed impulsively to her breast, and then received the same fervent welcome from her father.

But never could anything like that take place before witnesses.

When the child saw her parents she walked gravely up to them, having first done her utmost to remove the traces of tears, and took her place by their side. The mother said something in her native tongue, but it could not have been of much account, for the child gave no reply.

Omas did not speak. One quick glance was bestowed upon his child, and then he addressed himself to the work before him.

Omas was as cunning as a serpent. He would not have hesitated to assail these two Senecas, for, truth, to tell, he could never feel much love for the conquerors of his people. He did not fear them; but he saw the way of winning his point without such tempestuous violence.

His words, therefore, were calculated to soothe rather than irritate. He asked them to explain how it was they were in charge of his friends, and listened attentively while one of them answered his inquiry.

Then, as is natural with his race, he recounted in somewhat extravagant language his own deeds of the last few days. There is reason to believe he gave himself credit for a number of exploits against the palefaces of which he was innocent.

Then he said the only ones he loved among the palefaces were the three present—he had entrusted his only child to them, and they had saved her from the anger of their people. He had slept under their roof, and eaten of their bread. They were his best friends; and his brave Seneca brothers, when they knew of this, would be glad. He had set out to conduct them to the settlements, and his brothers would wish all safe arrival there.

This speech, delivered with far more address than I am able to give it, worked as a charm. Not the slightest reference was made to the cowardly Red Wolf, though Omas knew all about him.

The Senecas were won by the words of the wily Delaware. They indulged in the fiction of saying that they had no thought of how matters stood between him and these palefaces, and their hearts were glad to hear the words fall from his lips. They would not harm his friends, and hoped they would reach in safety the settlement for which they were looking.

Not only that, but they offered to go with them all the way.

That was too kind, and the offer was gratefully declined. Then the Senecas withdrew first returning Ben's rifle to him. Whether they ever succeeded in overtaking Red Wolf cannot be known and it is of no moment.

The peril had burst over the heads of the little party like a thundercloud; and now it had cleared, and all was sunshine again.

It was some minutes before the Ripleys could fully understand the great good fortune that had come to them. Then their hearts overflowed with thankfulness.

With her arms clasping her children, Mrs. Ripley looked devoutly upward, and murmured:

"I thank Thee, Heavenly Father, for Thy great mercy to me and mine. Bless Omas and To-wika and Linna, and hold them forever in Thy precious keeping."

The events which had taken place were strange; but Mrs. Ripley maintained, to the end of her life, that those which followed were tenfold more remarkable.

You will remember that when Omas, after conducting the little company some distance from Wyoming showed a wish to leave them, the good woman had no doubt what his purpose was; he wanted to take part in further cruelties against the hapless settlers.

Omas had fought hard in the battle of July 3rd, 1778, and his friendship for the Ripleys drew him away before the dreadful doings were half completed. He yearned to go back and give rein to his ferocity. Mrs. Ripley tried to restrain him, but in vain.

Such were her views; but she was in error. She did not read the heart of the terrible warrior aright.

For weeks Omas had been sorely troubled in mind. He had visited the Christain brethren of his own tribe at the Moravain settlement of

Gnaddenbutten. He had listened to the talk of the missionaries, and had heard of One who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; who, when He was smitten and spat upon, bore it meekly; and who finally died on the cross, that the red men as well as the white children might be saved.

All this was a great mystery to the Delaware. He could not grasp the simple but sublime truths which lie at the foundation of Christianity. But he longed to do so. At midnight he lay trying to sleep in the silent woods, looking up at the stars and meditating of the wonderful Being who had done all this. In the simplicity of his nature, he talked to that awful and dimly comprehended Father of all races and peoples, and asked Him to tell Omas what he should say, and do, and think.

Unknown to him, To-wika his wife had listened to the teachings of the missionaries, and she had traversed further along the path of light than he.

When, therefore, he told her of his longings, his questionings, his doubts, his distress, his wretchedness, and his groping in the dark, she was able to say a great deal that helped to clear away the fogs and mists from his clouded brain.

But Omas was in the very depth of darkness, and almost despair, when the fearful episode of Wyoming came. It was in desperation he went into that conflict, as a man will sometimes do to escape, as it were, from himself.

He fought like a demon, but he could not hush the still small voice within his breast. He felt that he must have relief, or he would do that which a wild Indian never does—make away with himself.

It was on his tongue more than once, while threading his way through the wilderness with his friends, to appeal to Mrs. Ripley; but with a natural shrinking he held back, fearing that with his broken words he could not make her understand his misery.

The only recourse was to go to To-wika, his wife. He had asked her to talk further with the missionaries, and then to repeat their words to him.

So it was that when he stole from the camp-fire like a thief in the night, it was not to return and take part in the scenes of violence in which he had already been so prominent an actor, but to do the very opposite.

It was a long tramp through the forest to his

own wigwam, and his people were aflame with excitement because of Wyoming; but the warrior hardly paused night and day until he flung himself down at the feet of To-wika and begged that he might die.

From this remarkable woman Linna had inherited more mental strength than from her iron-hearted father. To-wika talked soothingly to him, and for the first time in his blind groping he caught a glimmer of light. The blessed Word which had brought comfort and happiness to her is for all people and conditions, no matter how rude, how ignorant, and how fallen.

But To-wika felt the need of human help. She had never met Mrs. Ripley, but her husband had told of his welcome beneath that roof, and of what she said to him about the Saviour and God, who was so different from the Great Spirit of the red man. She knew this woman was a Christian, and she asked her husband to lead her to her.

He set out with her to overtake the little party who, with never a thought of what was going on, were struggling through the gloomy wilderness, beset by perils on every hand.

Since they were following no beaten path, except for a little way, the most perfect woodcraft was necessary to find them. Omas knew the direction they had taken, and calculated the time needed to reach the Delaware. It was easy, too, to locate the camp where he had parted from them, after which his wonderful skill enabled him to keep the trail along which he and his wife strode with double the speed of the fugitives.

When he discovered that three warriors were doing the same, all the old fire and wrath flamed up in his nature. The couple increased the ardor of their pursuit. And yet, but for the favoring aid of Heaven, they hardly could have come up at the crisis which brought them all together.

Under the blest instruction of Mrs. Ripley, the doubts of Omas finally vanished, never to return. The once mighty warrior, foremost in battle and ferocity and courage, became the meek, humble follower of the Saviour—triumphant in life, and doubly triumphant in death.

On the third day after the meeting in the woods, the party arrived at the little town of Stroudsburg, on the Upper Delaware, none having suffered the least harm. The skill of Omas kept them

supplied with food, and his familiarity with the route did much to lessen the hardships which otherwise they would have suffered.

Omas stayed several weeks at this place with his friends, and then he and his wife and little one joined the Christian settlement of Gnadden-budden, where the couple finished their days.

After a time, when it became safe for the Ripleys to return to the Wyoming Valley, they took up their residence there once more, and remained until the husband and father came back at the close of the Revolution; and the happy family were reunited, thankful that God had been so merciful to them and brought independence to their beloved country.

Omas and To-wika and Linna were welcome visitors as long as they lived. In truth, Linna survived them all. She married a chieftain among her own people, and, when she at last was gathered to her final rest, she had almost reached the great age of a hundred years.

A LITERARY WIFE

"MORNING, noon and night — all the time reading and idling about! What a shameful, yes, wicked waste of time! Oh, I declare, I shall not be surprised if one of these nights, the ghost of some one, or every one, of my industrious, hard-working ancestors came to warn me of my danger. Oh, I must get over this, indeed! Such a wife would ruin any man less than a millionaire. Thank Heaven, I have not committed myself; but there is no denying I do like Louise Hobart better than any girl I ever knew. And I think she is really charming. But I've seen what a terrible misfortune a lazy wife is to a man, in our own family. Jack's wife has pretty near ruined him. Well, I'm glad I can get over this; but it will come kind of hard; I've spent the evenings so pleasantly with Louise. How well she does talk! Any man might be proud of her. But talking won't make the pot boil. And a poor government clerk might need a wife who could help not only to make his pot boil, but to put something in it too."

Just here Charley Fulton's thoughts and steps were arrested by some one catching hold of him, and exclaiming:

"Stop! Hold on, Fulton! What's up! You are going ahead at such a mad rate, I could hardly catch up to you. Are you trying to escape the Evil One?"

"Maybe I am," returned Charley, with more meaning in his words than his friend Ned Wilmer knew. "I did not know I was traveling so fast, however."

"Yes, I saw you when you came out of Mr. Hobart's. Rather an early call, Charley?" his friend said, inquiringly.

"Yes; I only called to invite Louise to the concert tonight, but she is engaged—"

"Yes, old fellow, I was before you this time," Ned said, smiling pleasantly; then putting his arm through Charley's, he added: "I have wanted an opportunity to talk to you, Fulton. We have so long been friends, I should regret very much that anything should interrupt our kindly intercourse."

"Why, what do you mean? I can imagine no cause—"

"Charley, yes. You like Louise Hobart, I believe?"

"Yes, very much."

"And so do I. More than this, I shall win her, if possible," Ned Wilmer said, looking at his friend as though he expected and was prepared for some fierce demonstration.

"All right! Go ahead. My dear boy, I shall not feel any the less kindly if you succeed. Indeed, you have my best wishes for your success," Charley answered, extending his hand.

"What! you are not really in earnest? Surely, you must have felt differently, or why have you been such a constant visitor there?" Ned Wilmer asked.

"I'll tell you just what I was telling myself when you came up. I do like Louise very much. She is really charming. But, Ned, she is not the girl for

either you or me. You know how very idle, yes, and wasteful she is. Think how much time, yes, and money, too, is lost so. Poor clerks should choose girls who will *help* them, not be a burden such as I fear Louise will prove. Now you know just what it is that makes me so calm at the prospect of another winning her."

"You are wise, perhaps. I know Louise's failing — I suppose we must call it — but I can't resist the love which increases every hour I am with her. If I can win her I shall. So let me have the coast clear, and I will thank you."

"Oh, come, don't banish me so suddenly. Let me drop in occasionally. I cannot resign the pleasure of her society entirely just yet. I must come to it gradually. I declare I would sooner listen to Louise's talk than go to any opera, theater or lecture; yes, or eat the best dinner that ever was cooked. But you know, Ned, *that* gift is not going to make a home comfortable or happy."

"I only know that I love her," answered Ned.

Just at that moment Charley raised his hat to a lady passing, remarking, when she was out of hearing:

"That girl, I am sure, will make the man happy who may be so fortunate as to win her. At school she was the most industrious little body I ever saw. Even during the recreation hours she was always working at something. She is just my idea of what a woman should be."

"Well, I wonder you have not tried to win the prize," Ned Wilmer said.

"I believe I should, but for— What shall I say? Not the superior attractions of another — nor the

A Literary Wife

brilliancy. But all is not gold that glitters, you know. Well, we part here. Good morning."

Ned Wilmer's heart was lighter than for many months. He had greatly feared Charley Fulton would win the girl he loved. And now that he had good hope of securing the one, and retaining the friendship of the other he was in a very happy state of mind.

That night Charley called on Annie Warner, the young girl of whom he had spoken so highly that morning.

Although he found other company, Annie's fingers were as busy as her tongue; indeed, more so: the latter often rested, the former never, even when entertaining friends.

Never were girls more dissimilar than Louise Hobart and Annie Warner: the one brilliant, sparkling, and really gifted; but — well, of her failings, as the young men agreed to term them, enough has been said.

Well assured was Charley Fulton that from such, Annie, gentle, sweet little Annie Warner was free. No one ever found her idling her time over old books, or new ones. She was the tidiest little housekeeper; could make the best bread, nicest and lightest pies, puddings and cakes; was the most skilful seamstress — in fact, knew everything except what Charley thought was perfectly useless, and he said:

"What is the good of a woman knowing all about every book and its author, from the very first that was ever written to those of the present time? I truly believe Louise Hobart does. If a man wants a history, biography, or encyclopædia, he can buy them — no need get a wife that is a combination of all! — poor Ned!"

During the evening a circumstance occurred which really decided Charley's future.

Annie's father came in, bringing a box wrapped and securely tied. Handing it to Annie, he said:

"A present for you, daughter."

Her eyes sparkled with pleasure as she thanked him and began to untie the cord. The knots were stubborn, resisting her efforts.

Charley pulled out his knife, and her brother said:

"Oh, cut it, Annie. We are all eager for a look."

"So am I," she answered. "But it will be too bad to waste such a nice string; it will do to use again."

After at least five minutes spent in picking and pulling, the knots loosened. Annie wound up the cord, secured the end, and laid it aside. Then the paper was taken off and nicely folded, for future use, too, before Annie opened the box.

"That girl is the one for me. No fear of her proving other than a helpmate," Charley said, gazing with admiration on Annie, who drew from the box a beautiful sealskin muff and tippet.

As Charley's mind reverted again to this incident, another was remembered which proved conclusively to his mind the wasteful disposition of Louise.

One evening, a few weeks previous, while Charley and Ned Wilmer sat listening to a poem Louise was reading, a playful kitten found its way into her work-basket, and was not discovered until half a dozen skeins of silk and as many spools of cotton were dragged about the floor, and in such a condition that it would have taken some skill and a great deal of patience to untangle the threads.

Louise looked at the mass a moment, then clipping

away the spools, threw the snarled bunches into the fire, saying:

"Pshaw! I could read half a dozen chapters, or spend the time in thinking, which is next best to reading, that it would take to untangle that. I won't waste so many precious moments."

Inwardly Charley congratulated himself on his escape.

After one or two more visits to Louise, which strengthened his belief that she would make poor Ned rue the day he married her, if he should do so, Charley devoted himself earnestly to his wooing; Ned Wilmer doing likewise.

At the end of six months both were married to the girls of their choice. Calls were exchanged between the brides, and occasionally, at long intervals, after. But as there was but little congeniality, there could be no intimacy.

Ned Wilmer was very warmly attached to his friend, and would drop in for an hour in the evening, two or three times a year. Thus four years were passed.

Ned Wilmer came in one evening, and after watching Louise, who, as usual, was absorbed in a book, said:

"I'm just from Fulton's."

"Indeed!" Louise said, closing her book, and asking, "How are they? Is Mrs. Fulton just such an industrious little body as ever? Come, tell me all about them. I see from your eyes you have lots of news."

"No, not much news. I found them well, and Mrs. Fulton busily engaged with a new sewing machine. I wonder you have not wanted one, Louise. Charley is very anxious I should purchase one for you."

"I don't want it. I detest them. I don't care a

snap for ruffles, tucks, puffs, and such fixings, for myself; and I'm not going to get the children up in that style. I want to cultivate their taste for something higher than the latest fashions—"

"But I should think it would be a source of amusement," interrupted Ned.

"No, indeed, I'm not going to spend *my* leisure hours over a sewing machine. After the necessary work is done, your wants and the children's attended to, you know — I always have near me the best amusement in the world, *I* think," Louise answered, holding up her book.

"Yes, dear, I know. But what does your reading profit your family?"

Louise's face flushed quickly, and her husband hastened to add:

"I am perfectly satisfied, dear. You do all I care to have you, as long as I keep my office and good health. But both are uncertain. Now Charley tells me *his* wife makes sufficient to dress herself and the children by her machine — stitching for a few friends. She can easily make twenty dollars a month just by working a few hours in the evening."

Louise's lip curled as she repeated:

"Twenty dollars! Working away health and strength that should be saved for her children's sake, for twenty dollars a month!"

"Louise, I would not consent to have you do so. But, dear, suppose Charley and I both should lose our offices, which family would likely suffer the least?"

"I don't know anything about what Charley Fulton's family would do; but I *do* know *yours* would not suffer for anything."

"How could it be otherwise?" Ned asked.

"I would not let either you or yours," Louise answered, her face glowing brightly.

"*You*, child! What could you do, except to love us with your whole heart, and read and talk? Oh, if either of those would pay, wouldn't we be rich, love?" Ned said, raising her face and kissing the pouting lips.

"Yes, good reading does pay, just as well as good feeding. It has improved my mind, and I can write books myself," Louise answered, with sparkling eyes.

"You write, Louise! Well, perhaps you might, if you would try—"

"*Might!*" she said, interrupting him. "I *have* written stories, and they have been published, and paid for, too. I have never told you this, because I know many gentlemen have a horror of literary women. Since my marriage my time has been devoted to you and our little ones. I have seen no necessity for my using this gift or talent, therefore have husbanded my strength for use when the time comes. Now, sir, if the test comes, you shall see if you have such a good-for-nothing wife."

Ned was too surprised to say anything for a few moments; but he did look at his wife, and with admiration quite sufficient to satisfy her.

It was not long before the test came. Charley lost his position by a change in the administration; and Ned Wilmer, after an attack of pneumonia, was left with a bronchial affection, which was considered so serious that his physician insisted he should go to Florida.

Then Louise went to work — *then* her husband and the world knew what she could do.

After the leave granted him by the department expired Louise insisted upon his resigning and remaining South. In a few months she went with the children to join him, and stayed for two years, until Ned was fully restored to his usual good health.

Bravely Charley Fulton's wife worked, too, doing no less than her husband had believed she could and would. But Louise! Charley Fulton could scarcely credit his eyes and ears. To do him justice, he would not have exchanged his own devoted and loving little wife for any other woman; yet he could not help the thought frequently entering his mind, when he so often heard Louise's praises, "Was he wise?"

THE END.

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